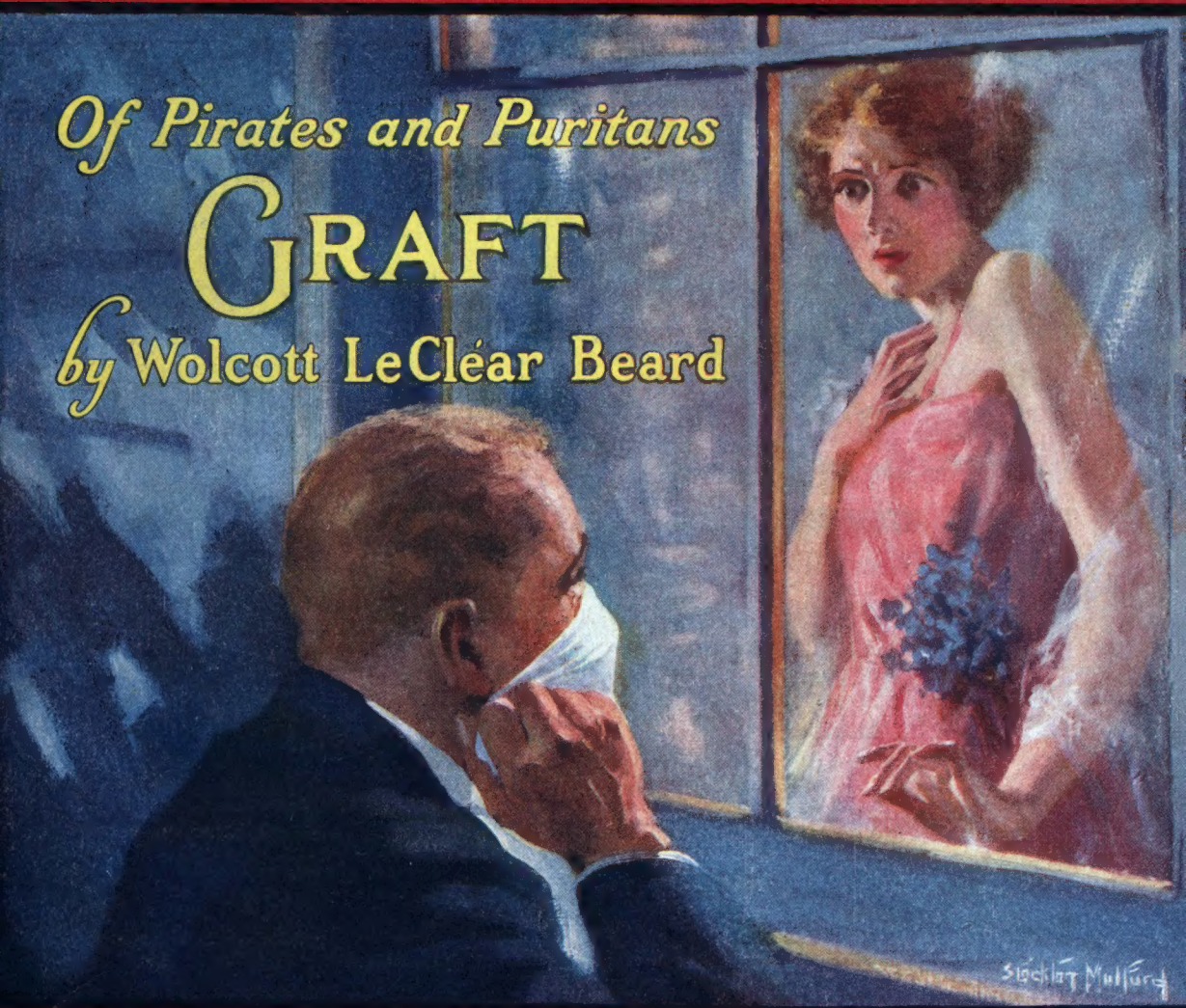
ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY



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A Room Full of Furniture

New Set With Solid Comfort Morris Rocker

Only $1.00 with the coupon below brings this sensational furniture bargain on 30 days trial. 6 splendid pieces of furniture **including a wonderfully luxurious and comfortable reclining Morris rocker with disappearing foot-rest and adjustable back.** A few months ago a set like this would have cost you $45.00. But now, on a special factory sacrifice, we can slash the price on this complete set to only $33.80 and on easy payments of only $3.00 a month! Seize this wonderful opportunity on this special offer. We take all the risk

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Use this magnificent 6-piece library set for 30 days. Compare it with anything you can buy locally at anywhere near the same price—even for spot cash. Then if not satisfied for any reason, return the set at our expense and we'll refund your $1 at once, plus any freight charges you paid. If you decide to keep the set start paying only $3.00 a month until you have paid $33.80. A full year to pay. We trust honest people anywhere in U. S. One price, cash or credit. No discount for cash, nothing extra for credit, no C. O. D.

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Morris Rocker has the real comfort giving features of the Morris chair and couch, as well as the additional advantage of a rocker. The back is adjustable to 3 positions. Foot rest can be extended or hidden entirely under seat. Seat measures 20 x 20 inches, width of back 27 inches, height of back from seat 28 inches. Arms 4 inches wide.

Arm Chair is a roomy, dignified piece of furniture, comfortable and big enough for a very large person while not seeming too large for the ordinary occupant. Seat 19 x 17 1-2 in., height 36 in.

Arm Rocker is a massive, stately, comfortable piece, with beautifully designed back, wide, shapely arms, and smooth operating runners. Seat 19 x 17 1-2 in., height 36 in.

Library Table — A beautiful piece of library furniture. Beautifully designed ends to match chairs with roomy magazine shelf below. Legs cut of 2 in. stock; massive, dignified. Top measures 23 1-4 x 34 in.

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Don't delay. Just send $1.00 with the coupon. If you wish to return the set after 30 days, your dollar will be refunded, plus all freight charges which you paid. Remember, this is a special limited reduced price approval offer. We will also send our *free* Bargain Catalog listing thousands of amazing bargains. Send coupon *now.*

Straus & Schram, Department 9273 CHICAGO, ILL.

Straus & Schram, Dept. 9273 Chicago, Illinois

Enclosed find $1.00. Ship special advertised 6-Piece Fumed Oak Library Set. I am to have 30 days free trial. If I keep the set, I will pay you $3.00 monthly. If not satisfied, I am to return the set within 30 days and you are to refund my money and any freight charges I paid.

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☐ Furniture, Stoves, Jewelry ☐ Men's, Women's, Children's Clothing

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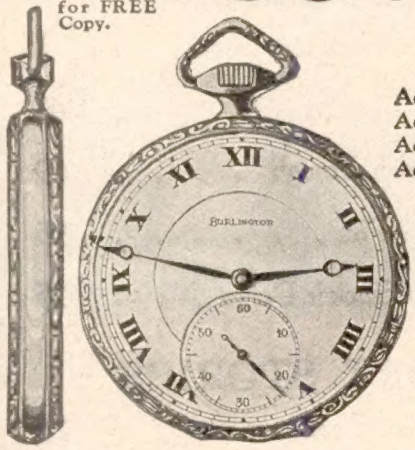

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Canadian Address: 62 Albert Street, Winnipeg, Manitoba

Burlington Watch Company
Dept. 94-53, 19th St. and Marshall Blvd., Chicago
Canadian Address: 62 Albert St., Winnipeg, Manitoba

Please send me (without obligations and prepaid) your free book on watches with full explanation of your $1.00 down offer on the Burlington Watch.

Name ----------

Address ----------

ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY

VOL. CL CONTENTS FOR MARCH 17, 1923 NUMBER 1

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ANOTHER STORY OF THE WEST

Next week we shall give you the opening chapters of as thrilling a tale of the oil regions as any one could ask for.

A BOOB THERE WAS

By C. C. WADDELL, author of "So This Is Arizona!"

although starting at a manicure's table in New York quickly shifts to New Mexico and involves its hero in perils both alow and aloft from which it would seem there was no way out.

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 280 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, and TEMPLE HOUSE, TEMPLE AVENUE, E. C., LONDON

FRANK A. MUNSEY, President RICHARD H. TITHERINGTON, Secretary CHRISTOPHER H. POPE, Treasurer

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"O.K." say 5000 READERS

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"Worth ten times their price." "I wouldn't send them back for a handful of diamonds." "I congratulate you on their excellence." "Helped me to two raises in four months." "Better than a school of instruction." "Studied them when I was laid up and got further ahead than if I'd been on the job."

These are the words of gratitude that come to us by every mail from Electrical workers. There is no short cut to **genius.** But there **are** sign posts all along the road to success. **Hawkins Electrical Guides** find these sign posts for you. It is so easy to pay for the **Guides** that you will scarcely miss the monthly payments.

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Do you want to know the facts about the following electrical subjects? They are all covered in Hawkins Electrical Guides.

Electrical signs and symbols—static and current electricity—primary cells—conductors and insulators—resistance and conductivity—magnetism—induction coils—dynamo principles—classes of dynamos—armatures—windings—commutator brushes. Motor principles—armature reaction—motor starting—calculations—brake horsepower—selection and installation of dynamos and motors—galvanometers—standard cells—current measurement—resistance measurement—voltmeters—wattmeters—watt-hour meters—operation of dynamos—operation of motors. Distribution systems—wires and wire calculations—inside, outside and underground wiring—sign flashers—lightning protection—rectifiers—storage battery systems. Alternating current principles—alternating current diagrams—the power factor—alternator principles—alternating construction—windings. A. C. Motors—synchronous and induction motor principles—A. C. commutator motors—induction motors, transformers; losses, construction, connections, tests—converters—rectifiers. Alternating current systems—switching devices—circuit breakers—relays—lightning protector apparatus—regulating device—synchronous condensers—indicating devices—meters—power factor indicators—wave form measurement—switch boards. Alternating current, wiring power stations—turbines: management, selection, location, erection, testing, running, care and repair—telephones. Telegraph—simultaneous telegraphy and telephony—wireless—electric bells—electric lighting photometry. Electric railways—electric locomotives—car lighting—trolley car operation—miscellaneous applications—motion pictures—gas engine ignition—automobile self-starters and lighting systems, electric vehicles. Elevators—cranes—pumps—air compressors—electric heating, electric welding—soldering and brazing—industrial electrolysis—electro-plating—electro-therapeutics—X-rays.

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Please submit me for free examination, HAWKINS ELECTRICAL GUIDE, (Price $1 a number). Ship at once prepaid, the 10 numbers. If satisfactory, I agree to send you $1 within seven days and to further mail you $1 each month until paid.

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Occupation .....

Employed by .....

Home Address .....

Reference .....

Arg. Mar. 17, '23.

Classified Advertising

The Purpose of this Department

is to put the reader in touch immediately with the newest needfuls for the home, office, farm, or person; to offer, or seek, an unusual business opportunity, or to suggest a service that may be performed satisfactorily through correspondence. It will pay a housewife or business man equally well to read these advertisements carefully.

Classified Advertising Rates in the Munsey Magazines:

	Line Rate
Munsey's Magazine	$1.50
Argosy-Allstory Weekly	2.50

Minimum space four lines.

Combination Line Rate $4.00 Less 2% cash discount

April 28th Argosy-Allstory Forms Close March 31st.

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

AUTOMOBILE FREE TO TAILORING AGENTS: MAKE $75.00 A WEEK AND UP AND GET AN AUTOMOBILE FREE TAKING ORDERS FOR OUR FINE TAILORED-TO-MEASURE SUITS. BIG ASSORTMENT OF ALL-WOOL FABRICS ALL AT THE ONE LOW PRICE OF $29.75. EVERY ORDER PAYS YOU BIG CASH PROFIT IN ADVANCE. WE SUPPLY FINEST SELLING OUTFIT AND GIVE AN AUTOMOBILE FREE TO EVERY MAN WHO QUALIFIES. Write quick for startling offer. Dept. 578, PARK TAILORING CO., Chicago, Ill.

GET OUR FREE SAMPLE CASE—Toilet articles, perfumes and specialties. Wonderfully profitable. LA DERMA CO., Dept. D, St. Louis, Mo.

$50,000 PICTURE MAN FRIEDMAN MADE TAKING ORDERS. Beginners can make $100.00 weekly with my canvassing spiel, experienced men make more. Free circular "Profits in Portraits" explains. Samples free. PICTURE MAN FRIEDMAN, Dept. A, 673 Madison, Chicago.

TREMENDOUS OPPORTUNITY for ambitious agents. The indispensable, rapid selling Speedy Dish Washer. Price $3.50. No competition. No investment. Easy selling plan. Convenient sample. Commission daily. Make application today—exclusive territory. Shepperd-Luth Mfg. Co., 16-C Hudson St., New York.

OUR AGENTS MAKE $35 TO $50 DAILY and are getting it with new marvelous invention. Sells to everybody. Low price. Pocket outfit. Write SUREN CO., 25 N. Dearborn St., Chicago.

LIVE AGENTS MAKE $10 DAY SELLING EUREKA STRAINER and Splash Preventer for every water faucet. Takes on sight. Widely advertised and known. Get details today. A. D. Seed Filter Company, 73 Franklin, New York.

Tailoring Salesmen—$5.00 to $15.00 Profit on Each Order. All-Wool suits and extra pants to retail at $26.50 and up. Fit and workmanship absolutely guaranteed. Write today for new Spring swatch line showing 250 large woolen samples. JAY ROSE & CO., Dept. A-100, 411 S. Wells St., Chicago, Ill.

Big Money, Quick Sales, Fine Profits and steady demand selling Clows-Knit guaranteed hosiery direct from mill to wearers. All styles for men, women, children. Many making $3000 year. George Clows Co., Desk 42, Philadelphia.

27,000 RECORDS GUARANTEED WITH ONE EVERPLAY PHONOGRAPH NEEDLE; new, different; cannot injure records; $10.00 daily easy. Free sample to workers. EVERPLAY, Desk 312, McClurg Bldg., Chicago.

FORD OWNERS earn big money, whole or part time, selling wonderful invention of founder Buick Motor. Write David Buick Carburetor Corporation, 5810 Commonwealth Ave., Detroit.

WE START YOU in business, furnishing everything. Men and women, $30.00 to $100.00 weekly operating our "New System Specialty Candy Factories" anywhere. Opportunity lifetime; booklet free. W. Hillyer Ragsdale, Drawer 93, East Orange, N. J.

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FREE TO WRITERS—a wonderful little book of money making hints, suggestions, ideas; the A B C of successful Story and Movie-Play writing. Absolutely free. Send for your copy now! Just address Authors' Press, Dept. 19 Auburn, N. Y.

STORIES, POEMS, PLAYS, ETC., ARE WANTED for publication. Good ideas bring big money. Submit Mss., or write Literary Bureau, 110, Hannibal, Mo.

MICHIGAN FARM LANDS FOR SALE

GOOD FARM LANDS! Near thriving city in lower Mich. 20, 40, 80 ac. tracts; only $10 to $50 down; bal. long time. Write today for big booklet free. Swigart Land Co., Y-1245, First Nat'l Bank Bldg., Chicago.

AUTOMOBILES

AUTOMOBILE OWNERS, GARAGEMEN, MECHANICS, send today for free copy America's most popular motor magazine. Contains helpful articles on overhauling, repairing, ignition, carburetors, batteries, etc. AUTOMOBILE DIGEST, 500 Butler Bldg., Cincinnati.

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

TAILORING Agent—Good men now earning $50.00 to $150.00 week year around selling our wonderful $29.50 virgin wool tailored to order suits, overcoats. They sell fast because $20.00 cheaper than store prices. You get paid in advance. Protected territory. Prefer experienced; will train inexperienced if right man. Write J. B. SIMPSON, personal, 831 W. Adams St., Chicago, Dept. 525.

WE PAY $200 monthly salary, furnish rig and expenses to introduce our guaranteed poultry and stock powders. BIGLER COMPANY, X-506, Springfield, Illinois.

Clarke made $18 an hour selling vestpocket windshield cleaner needed by every autoist, motorman, engineer; one rub keeps glass clear 24 hours; 60,000 sold. Amazing proposition free. Security Mfg. Co., Dept. 676, Toledo, Ohio.

$1.95 FOR MADE-TO-ORDER PANTS—Special 30-day offer to prove our marvelous values in made-to-measure tailoring. **Agents Wanted.** Earn $30 to $35 **Extra Every Week,** taking orders for our high-class, made-to-measure clothes. No experience necessary. Write for samples **today.** THE PROGRESS TAILORING CO., Dept. Q-104, Chicago.

AGENTS—OUR SOAP AND TOILET ARTICLE PLAN IS A WONDER. GET OUR FREE SAMPLE CASE OFFER. HO-RO-CO, 137 LOCUST, ST. LOUIS, MO.

PORTRAIT AGENTS: Our goods will make you big profits. Delivery guaranteed. Rejects credited. Prompt shipments. Send for latest catalog and prices. ADAM J. KROLL & CO., 600 Blue Island Ave., Chicago, Ill.

AGENTS—MAKE A DOLLAR AN HOUR. Sell Mendets, a patent patch for instantly mending leaks in all utensils. Sample package free. Collette Manufacturing Company, Dept. 306-B, Amsterdam, N. Y.

AGENTS—C. T. A. prices reduced again. Suits $18.00, made to order, any size or style. Orders easy to get. Big profits. Sample outfit free. Write Chicago Tailors Ass'n, World's largest tailors, Dept. 369, Station C, Chicago.

GET FREE SAMPLE OUTFIT! Earn $3,000 to $5,000 a year selling the most complete line guaranteed Hosiery and Underwear in America. No experience needed. You can become District Manager and have others working for you—if you act quick! Write today. Malloch Knitting Mills, 13 Hastings St., Grand Rapids, Mich.

DISTRICT SALESMEN WANTED, all or spare time. Earn $750 to $2000 yearly. We train the inexperienced. NOVELTY CUTLERY CO., 77 Bar St., Canton, Ohio.

Agents $60—$200 a week FREE SAMPLES Gold Sign Letters for Store Fronts and Office Windows. Anyone can put them on. Big demand everywhere. Liberal offer to general agents. METALLIC LETTER CO., 427 North Clark St., Chicago.

$5 TO $15 DAILY EASY—Introducing New Style Guaranteed Hosiery. Must wear or replaced free. No capital or experience required. Just show samples, write orders. We deliver and collect. Your pay in advance. Elegant outfit furnished, all colors and grades including silks. MAC-O-CHEE MILLS CO., Desk 2705, Cincinnati, O.

RUMMAGE SALES MAKE $50.00 DAILY. We start you. Representatives wanted everywhere. Permanent business. Dept. 26, "WHOLESALE DISTRIBUTORS," 609 Division St., Chicago.

SONG POEMS WANTED

SONG WRITERS—If you have song poems or melodies write me immediately. I have absolutely the very best proposition to offer you. Act now and be convinced. RAY HIBBELER, D-147, 4040 Dickens Ave., Chicago.

WRITERS! GET CASH FOR SONG-POEMS, STORIES OR PHOTOPLAYS. SUBMIT MSS. OR WRITE MUSIC SALES CO., 60, ST. LOUIS, MO.

WRITE THE WORDS FOR A SONG. We compose music. Our Chief of Staff wrote many big song-hits. Submit your song-poem to us at once. NEW YORK MELODY CORP., 403 Fitzgerald Building, New York.

Classified Advertising continued on page 6.

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Earn $40 to $150 a Week!

Think of it—over 9,000,000 automobiles are in use in the U. S. There never was a better opportunity for money making than the automobile field offers you right now. Think of the money spent every year to keep all these cars in a going condition. Think of the chances for the repairmen, chauffeurs, engineers and garage owners. Look at the autos being sold—both old and new. Look at the garages springing up here and there. This all means money, money, money for the fellows in the game. Get your share now. Men like you are needed everywhere to fill big paying jobs.

Easy to Learn We have made it easy for you to fit yourself for a job paying from $40.00 to $150.00 a week. You don't have to go to school. You don't have to serve an apprenticeship. Everything is worked out for you by fifteen great automobile engineers so you can become an auto expert in your spare time and keep on earning while you learn.

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- Explosion Motors
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- Lubrication
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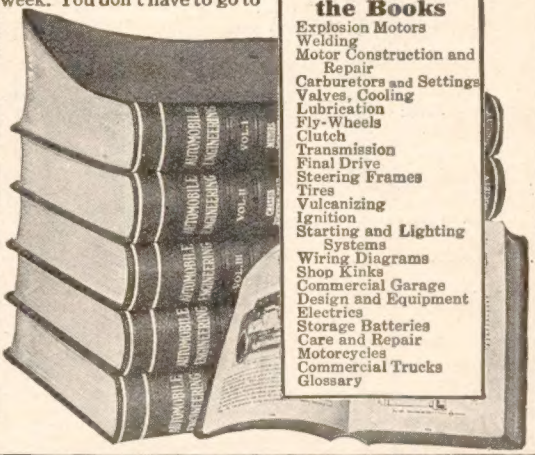
- Clutch
- Transmission
- Final Drive
- Steering Frames
- Tires
- Vulcanizing
- Ignition
- Starting and Lighting Systems
- Wiring Diagrams
- Shop Kinks
- Commercial Garage Design and Equipment
- Electrics
- Storage Batteries
- Care and Repair
- Motorcycles
- Commercial Trucks
- Glossary



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Now ready for you—the new 6-volume Library of Automobile Engineering—right up-to-date, showing all the new cars and the latest and best ways of doing things. It covers the construction, care and repair of every kind of automobile, truck and motorcycle. Just chock full of advance information on Ignition, Starting and Lighting Systems, Garage Design and Equipment, Welding and other repair methods. Everything that a mechanic or any man interested in automobiles should know. Written in simple language that anyone can understand. 2700 pages and 2400 pictures, plans, blueprints and wiring diagrams, all bound in tough, wear-resisting material and stamped in gold. Over 75,000 sets have been sold on our free trial—no money down plan.

10c a Day If Pleased

First you see the books in your own home or shop. Just mail coupon. You can read them and use them for 7 whole days before you decide. If you like the books, send only $2.80 in 7 days and $3 a month until the special reduced price of $21.80 has been paid. (Regular price $45).

No Money in Advance

Don't take our word for it that you can make money with the help of these books. Just mail the coupon and see the books without cost. Then talk it over with some of your friends and get their opinion. Don't waste a moment in sending for the books though. Put the coupon in the mails today. Send no money—just the coupon.

AMERICAN TECHNICAL SOCIETY
Dept. A-163, Chicago, Illinois

FREE EXAMINATION COUPON

American Technical Society, Dept. A-163, Chicago, Ill.

Send me the 6-volume set of Automobile Engineering books for a week's free trial, by express collect. I will either return the books in one week at your expense or send you $2.80 as first payment and $3.00 every month until a total of $21.80 has been paid.

Name.....

Address.....

City.....State.....

Employed by.....

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Fashionable Panel Model

The Rage This Season

WOOL Embroidered SERGE DRESSES

$3.79

You won't fully appreciate this marvelous bargain until you see it—that's why we send it to you no money down. Don't miss this great offer—a chance to get a real $8.00 dress at an immense saving. Our own special model, copied from the finest dresses brought out in the style centers this season. Becoming to women of every age, it is the rage of the year.

Send No Money

Fine quality Long-wear Blue Serge. Cut with the fashionable tunic effect skirt as shown. Beautiful chain stitch wool embroidery—won't pull out or run. French knot medallions. Six silk crochet pear shape tassels on panel points. Tuxedo roll collar ending in reveres. The newest loose hanging wide flare sleeves. All around belt. Skirt is the new stylish long length. You may be proud to wear this stunning dress in any company. Order Quick. Only limited offering. Send coupon, card or letter—no money. Pay postman $3.79 and postage on arrival as good faith deposit. If not delighted after try on, your money back without question. Sizes: Misses, 14, 16 and 18; Women's 32 to 46 bust.

Money Back Guaranteed

STATE SIZE.

REMINGTON Mail Order House
Dept. C-662
6646 S. Halsted, Chicago

C-662.

Send Wool Embroidered Parisian Special Blue Serge Dress at once. Will deposit $3.79 and postage with postman on arrival. I get my money back if I want it.

Name..... Size.....

Address.....

City..... State.....

$700 IN 2 HOURS!

That's what Ryan made by wearing this Mystic Egyptian Luck Ring. Why Be Unlucky? FAME — FORTUNE — HAPPINESS — SUCCESS IN LOVE AND BUSINESS are said by many men and women to have come to them with this SACRED SCARAB RING. Wear it And See. Makes A Desirable Gift. GUARANTEED STERLING SILVER.

Cash with Order $1.45—C. O. D. $1.55; Two Rings, Cash $2.75—C. O. D. $2.85. Money back if not satisfied. Foreign Countries Cash with Order

CHALENS SUPPLY HOUSE, Dept. 147, 7 S. Dearborn Street, Chicago, Ill.

12 Months to Pay

You can easily earn or save money for the small payments. Parents often advance first payment to help buy a RANGER bicycle. Choice of 44 styles, colors and sizes. FACTORY-TO-RIDER prices. DELIVERED FREE express prepaid on approval for 30 DAYS' TRIAL, *actual free riding test.* Tires best quality, at factory prices, *express prepaid.* Lamps, wheels, and equipment, low prices. Send No Money.

Mead Cycle Company Dept. F-30, Chicago

Write today for free Ranger Catalog, factory prices and marvelous easy payment terms

Classified Advertising continued from page 4.

HELP WANTED

BE A DETECTIVE—Earn Big Money. Great demand everywhere. Excellent opportunities for travel. Fascinating work. Make secret investigations. Experience unnecessary. Particulars free. Write, CAPTAIN WAGNER, 1968 Broadway, N. Y.

MEN—AGE 17 TO 45. EXPERIENCE UNNECESSARY. Travel; make secret investigations, reports. Salaries; expenses. American Foreign Detective Agency, 320, St. Louis, Mo.

RAILWAY MAIL CLERKS, STENOGRAPHERS, CLERKS, TYPISTS, wanted by Government. Examinations weekly. Prepare at home. Write for free list and plan T, payment after securing position. CSS, 1710 Market Street, Philadelphia.

SELL US YOUR SPARE TIME. YOU CAN EARN FIFTEEN TO FIFTY DOLLARS WEEKLY writing showcards at home. No canvassing. Pleasant, profitable profession, easily, quickly learned by our simple graphic block system. Artistic ability unnecessary. We instruct you and supply you work. Wilson Methods Ltd., Dept. G, Toronto, Canada.

HERE'S A BUSINESS—Requires only table room. We start and help build business. Work for us painting Landscape photo print pictures. No experience, outfit furnished. Free literature. TANGLEY COMPANY, 193 Main, Muscatine, Iowa.

HELP WANTED—MALE

BE A DETECTIVE—EXCELLENT OPPORTUNITY; good pay; travel. Write C. T. Ludwig, 126 Westover Building, Kansas City, Mo.

EARN $110 TO $250 MONTHLY, EXPENSES PAID, AS RAILWAY TRAFFIC INSPECTOR. POSITION GUARANTEED AFTER 3 MONTHS' SPARE TIME STUDY OR MONEY REFUNDED. EXCELLENT OPPORTUNITIES. WRITE FOR FREE BOOKLET CM-30. STAND. BUSINESS TRAINING INST., BUFFALO, N. Y.

All men, women, boys, girls, 17 to 60, willing to accept Government Positions, $117—$190, traveling or stationary, Write Mr. Ozment, 198, St. Louis, immediately.

HELP WANTED—FEMALE

WE PAY BIG MONEY FOR PAINTING PILLOW TOPS AND LAMP SHADES. SIMPLE, EASY, QUICK. EXPERIENCE UNNECESSARY. NILEART COMPANY, 2235, FT. WAYNE, IND.

HELP WANTED—GENERAL

EARN UP TO $400 MONTHLY, LIVING EXPENSES PAID, IN HOTEL WORK. SPLENDID OPPORTUNITIES FOR TRAINED MEN AND WOMEN—MANY OPENINGS. WE HAVE MORE THAN WE CAN FILL. 80,000 HOTEL POSITIONS TO BE FILLED THE COMING YEAR. WE TRAIN YOU AT HOME. SEND FOR FREE BOOKLET. STANDARD BUSINESS TRAINING INST., 200 CARLTON COURT, BUFFALO, N. Y.

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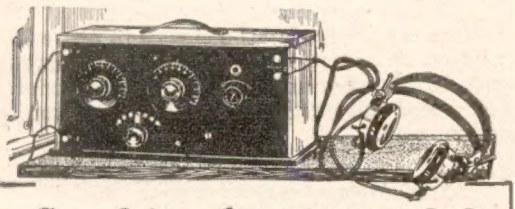

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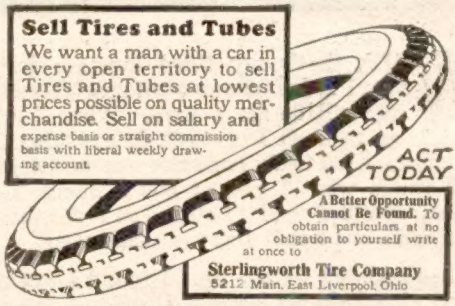

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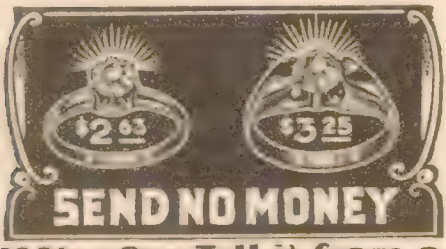

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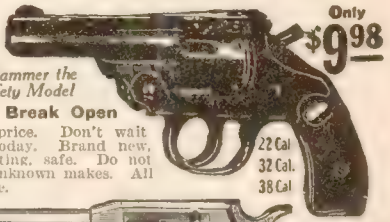

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A husband's story of the fulfillment of a life-long wish—by a new, easy, spare-time method which has brought the joy of music into thousands of silent homes.

FROM boyhood, I vowed that if ever I had a home of my own there would be music in it. No wife for me unless she could play some instrument and play it well.

But one day Beth came along, knowing not one note from another, and Beth is Mrs. Taylor today. A piano graced our new home, but somehow the old vow was forgotten, and stayed forgotten until Jimmy, Jr., and Beth No. 2 were quite some youngsters.

Then along about the time the novelty of parenthood began to wear off a bit, the yearning for music came back. And one evening I spoke out, "Beth, I'd give a hundred dollars if you could play something—piano, violin, banjo, ukulele—*anything*." Beth looked so hurt I was ashamed of myself, so I said no more.

About three months later I got home early one night, and heard the old piano come to life—first a little jazzy piece, then a sweet plantation melody. And there at the piano was **Beth**, playing, and the two kiddies beating time! She saw me, and stopped. "Oh," she cried, "I'm so sorry!" "Believe me, I'm not," I shouted, and I grabbed the whole family up in my arms.

"But, Jim, I wanted to wait and surprise you when I could really play. I'm learning fast, but it's only three months since I found out"—"Found out what?" I said. Beth began to cry. "I know!" Jimmy, Jr. piped up. "Mother found out the way to learn music just like I am learning to read in school—only lots easier."

Well, that musical party lasted all the evening. It was a howling success.

Jimmy, Jr. had told the truth; the method Beth had found was so easy that anyone at all, from 8 years up, could learn it. By this method the U. S. School of Music, the largest in the world, has already trained over 300,000 people, teaching the playing of any musical instrument almost in the same way a school-child learns to read.

When first learning to read you look at every letter separately, and spell out every word, c-a-t, m-a-n. Later you do not see the letters; you see the words as units, "cat," "man." By and by longer words become units to you, and you find that whole **expressions**, like "up the steps," "on the train," no longer are seen as separate words, but immediately, at an instant, without spelling, without thinking words, you see each expression in the unit form.

The alphabet of music follows the alphabet of language. Each note is a letter, and playing is practically spelling the notes together correctly. The first note on the staff above is F. Whether you sing or play, it is always F. The four notes shown above are F-A-C-E, easy to remember because they spell "face." Certain strings on mandolin, certain keys on piano, certain parts of all instruments, are these same notes. Once you learn them, playing melodies is a matter of **acting** what you **see**! You play almost before you realize it—and every step is real fun, fascinating, simple, interesting, almost too good to be true.

Remember, neither my wife nor most of the 300,000 other musicians trained by this method knew anything about music. Beth mastered the piano; she could just as easily have mastered anything else. Jimmy, Jr., is now taking up violin, and my daughter is learning singing. Right at home, no costly teacher, no classes at inconvenient hours, no useless study and practice. No numbers, no tricks, no makeshifts. But a sound, quick musical education, learning by **notes**. **Anyone** can **learn any** instrument or sing this way.

When I told Beth I was writing this out to put in a magazine, she told me to be sure and say that the school will gladly send a free book explaining everything, called "Music Lessons in Your Own Home," and that right now there is a special short-time Reduced Price Offer being made to music lovers. The book is free, asking for it obligates you not at all—but you should send for it right away before all copies are gone.

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I have more work than I can do. The people around Chehalis come to me to fix their starters, generators and ignition troubles because they know that I know how to do it right.

My success, I owe to you, Mr. Cooke. The thorough practical training which you gave me through your Easily-learned Home Study Course in Electricity has made me an independent, highly respected business man in this community. Sincerely yours, W. E. Pence.

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Let me send you my big free book giving details of the opportunities electricity offers you and a sample lesson also free. Mail the coupon and get this at once. Learn how other men "got themselves ready to hold good paying jobs" and how I can help you do the same. This is your big chance—take it.

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Chief Engineer, Chicago Engineering Works,
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2150 Lawrence Ave., Chicago

ARGOSY-ALLSTORY
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Graft

By WOLCOTT LeCLÉAR BEARD

Author of "For the Flag," etc.

CHAPTER I.

RINGSIDE SEATS.

A SLENDER, graceful figure tripped down the stairs of the Herondene mansion, which, surrounded by lawns studded with elms and maples, was the actual, the social and the historic center of the small New England city that had grown up on the farm a Puritan Herondene had purchased from the Indians. Except for her snow-white hair and the lavender and old lace of her gown, the figure was that of a girl of seventeen. The lady was nearer seventy.

As she walked down the ancient stepping stones, her friend and servant, Libby, pursued and overtook her.

"Miss Sophrony," called Libby, severely, "I swan ef I don't b'lieve thet you was a-gonter go 'way and leave this shet up in the clock case, where I seen you put it this mornin'!"

She held out a plethoric roll of bills as she spoke. Miss Herondene—Aunt Sophronia to all the city—took them and carelessly tucked them into her black-satin reticule. Libby shook her head with deep disapprobation.

"It's five thousand dollars," she re-

marked, her severity unabated. "You could buy a lot o' clo'es and shoes an' sech for the poor, with five thousand dollars."

"It's mighty little of it that the poor'll ever see," Aunt Sophronia smiled. "This five thousand is for spendin' on rum, an' race-horses and—well, the things that go with 'em."

There was no reflection of Aunt Sophronia's smile on Libby's face, as the latter turned away. Libby did not, to be sure, believe that Aunt Sophronia intended to plunge into a sudden whirl of the grosser forms of vice; but humor was not one of Libby's strong points, and forty years of close association had not served to enable her really to understand her adored mistress. Aunt Sophronia's smile broadened whimsically as she gazed after Libby's broad back retreating up the path.

"An ingrowing conscience, like Libby's, is a really awful affliction," she reflected, aloud. Then she called, "Edith!"

"Coming—just a minute!" responded a girl's voice, from the house; whereupon, for no apparent reason, another girl giggled.

Aunt Sophronia smiled again, this time with tolerant sympathy. She was more than a lovable spinster. She was also Miss Herondene—the fifth Sophronia of that ilk—owner and most capable manager of that portion of the bustling little city that had grown to overspread her ancestral acres.

From the house there came two girls, one young, one considerably younger, and both distractingly pretty. The junior of the two, Peggy Herondene, Aunt Sophronia's niece and one of her two surviving relatives, was still giggling; and the other, though smiling, blushed in confusion. Aunt Sophronia glanced interrogatively at her niece.

"Edie was ready on time, but as she passed that mirror in the passage she decided that the hat she wore wasn't fetching enough to complete her mash on poor Phil, so she had to go back and change it. That's what delayed us."

"Well, Edith surely ought to want to please Phil if she wants to please anybody," Aunt Sophronia, defended. "We didn't use words like 'mash' when I was a girl, and it doesn't sound any too becoming now, seems to me. But as for Edith's hat, it certainly has paid for the time it took to put it on. It's as sweet as the face under it—and no one could say more than that."

She squeezed Edith's arm and chuckled affectionately as she saw the older girl color still more deeply at her compliment. Peggy, with a laughing grimace at her aunt, ran out ahead, but stopped and turned in dismay as she saw the waiting carriage.

"Ah, Aunt Sophy!" she cried. "Why—oh, *why*—to-day of all days—did you order out the ark and hippopotamuses?"

"The *what*?" asked Edith.

"It's just her silliness. She means the carriage," explained Aunt Sophronia.

The carriage referred to was an ancient but immaculate landau, drawn by a pair of fat, gray horses driven by a coachman fatter and grayer than they.

"We've got a flock of motor cars, and when she wants to Aunt Sophy can drive 'em like Ralph De Palma," pouted Peggy. "But she doesn't use them at all, mostly. She just *won't!* She keeps up this turn-out because she's afraid, if she didn't, that she'd hurt the feelings of old Peter, the coachman, and when she has particular business she won't drive in anything else."

"Just so," assented Aunt Sophronia. "I have business to-day. To begin with, I want to look up the exact price that Sophronius Herondene paid for this land when he bought it from the Indians."

"You know what he paid, Aunt Sophy." Peggy reached into the carriage and jerked into place a concealed seat, intended for the use of a child, but which she knew she would have to occupy. "He bought the land," she continued, "for some beads and some rum. Everybody knows that."

"Yes," admitted Aunt Sophronia, "but they don't know how many beads and how much rum, and that's what I want to find out. And I have other business besides—business that I may want to consult Peter about."

They had been speaking in ordinary conversational tones, and Peter, the coachman, was as close to them as they were to each other. Though he sat as immovable as the Sphinx, with no sign of having overheard what was said, this discussion, in which his name had so figured, gave Edith a distinct

shock. She had known Aunt Sophronia and Peggy only slightly until she had come to visit them, the day before; but thoughtless and impulsive though the latter was, neither had impressed her as one who would allow even a servant to overhear an unkind word.

Edith and Aunt Sophronia had seated themselves in the landau when Peggy, still standing, extended a hand to Peter, who thereupon produced a pad, with pencil attached. On the pad Peggy wrote, "The new Terminal Building," and handed it back. Peter saluted with his whip. Peggy took her low seat—sulkily, because it brought her slender young knees into undignified proximity with her chin. She indicated the old coachman with a backward toss of her head.

"He's as deaf as a cash-register," she explained to Edith.

"Yes," agreed Aunt Sophronia, "he is. But he doesn't make half so much noise as a cash register. That's the reason I like to consult him when I'm puzzled; he can't hear and he won't interrupt, and I find that the things that bother me will often straighten themselves right out, once I put 'em into words. That's the new Terminal Building, Edith—that white one, with the sun on it, 'way over there on the flats. You can see it real plain from here, though it's 'most two miles away."

Edith looked eagerly. The Terminal Building, now almost completed, meant much to her because it was all-important to the two beings for whom she cared most on earth—her father, Robert Ayres, the engineer, and Philip Herondene, his junior partner, Aunt Sophronia's nephew and Peggy's brother, to whom Edith was engaged to be married.

This terminal, the great building itself and the railway tracks that gathered under and around it in so intricate a maze, had been designed by the firm of Ayres & Herondene, and that firm was now superintending construction. It was by far the most important engineering enterprise that for a decade had been undertaken in the state. Upon its success depended in a very large degree the reputation of the firm, especially the future of its junior member.

Therefore the firm—and especially its junior member—had struggled mightily and still were struggling against difficulties that were many and grievous. With all the strength of her hotly partisan, feminine nature, Edith resented these difficulties, each and every one. For they were not those of a professional sort, to overcome which would add to the glory of achievement. Quite the contrary. They were of the sort to which no professional man—no honest man of any kind—ever should be subjected, but to which they so frequently are.

The distant building, practically completed, looked very peaceful as it stood glimmering in the sun. The fat horses pattered sedately along the smooth roadway. Aunt Sophronia leaned back in her seat, shading her eyes with a little black parasol that had a joint in its handle so that its top, not much larger than a dinner plate, could be, and was, turned sidewise. Peggy, constitutionally unable long to retain ill humor, was once more serene. Edith knew that many pleasant things had been planned for her visit. Small wonder, then, that for the time all troubles sank far into the background of her mind.

"Aren't you going to get out here?" asked Peggy, as they passed the City Hall, which also housed the municipal historical library. But Aunt Sophronia only shook her head, and the landau, unchecked, pursued its leisurely way until, a little farther on, the terminal was reached.

Here, amid the débris of building, Phil Herondene had posted himself to await their coming. But he did not see his aunt's equipage as it approached. His attention for the moment was given to two men, or rather, to the foremost of two men, who had just accosted him.

The man was huge, florid and loud in dress and manner. Through her gold-rimmed spectacles Aunt Sophronia eyed him, noting with disapproving appraisal every visible detail of his appearance, from the chewed cigar that graced one corner of his loose mouth and the three-carat brilliant that glittered in his tie, to the gaudy tops of his lemon-colored boots. His companion, a human ferret, clad in the frock coat, string tie and soft black hat, which is al-

most a forensic uniform in that part of the world, she passed by with a scornful glance and still more scornful comment.

"That little weasle-man is Wash Dunning, our district attorney, and a little shyster—of course. His first case, I remember, was defending his own father, who stole two shoats from *my* father in the year 1886. The big one, though, must be that Lafe Feelin, the contractor Phil talks so much about. It seems he has money. Probably somebody else's money, by the looks of him. He comes from your home town, doesn't he, Edith? Do you know anything about him?"

"Yes!" she answered, in a half whisper so husky and frightened that Aunt Sophronia glanced quickly around. She saw that the girl's face had lost the color which added so much to its charm, and that her eyes, wide with terrified anxiety, were fixed upon the man of whom they had been speaking—Feelin.

Plainly Feelin was angry. He hunched his shoulders belligerently and took a step closer to the young engineer. Impulsively Edith started to leave the carriage. With a restraining hand that was far stronger than it appeared to be, Aunt Sophronia held her back.

"Let me go!" hissed Edith in that husky, frightened whisper. "I can stop him—perhaps. But you don't know that man—that Feelin. He has threatened. I've heard him—in our house, talking to my father—"

"There's a policeman over there," interrupted Peggy, affected by Edith's alarm. "Shall I call him?"

For an instant Aunt Sophronia did not answer, but glanced appraisingly at the three men. She saw that Phil's mouth, so like her own, was set in a thin, straight line; that the expression of Feelin's back—and backs are frequently quite as expressive as faces—showed the strain on his temper had almost reached the breaking point, while Dunning, the district attorney, hovered uncertainly about like a dog of uncertain lineage. A light born of her fighting ancestors appeared in Aunt Sophronia's keen, blue eyes, and she answered Peggy's question.

"Yes, call that policeman," she commanded. "He's Peleg Wilcox; I've known him all his life. Tell him to come here—here, to me!"

Peggy sped away on her errand. Still looking with real artistic appreciation at the tableau before her, Aunt Sophronia took Edith's hand and patted it comfortingly.

"Dear, I wouldn't be afraid if I were you," said she. "Phil's just 'tendin' to his business; that's all. Just sit still and watch 'em. It's like a moving picture—isn't it? Oh, here you are. Good afternoon, Peleg."

Peleg grinned, and touched his cap respectfully. Aunt Sophronia, hastily fumbling at her reticule, produced the roll of bills that it contained.

"Peleg," she said, "I want you to count this money here—on my lap. Edith, just stay where you are. Go on, Peleg—begin, I say! And count carefully; I want to be sure."

Wondering, but obedient, Peleg began, standing on the sidewalk with his back to the building and clumsily placing the bills, one by one, in Aunt Sophronia's lap. And for her purpose he began not a second too soon.

The first bill scarcely had fallen from Peleg's blunt-ended fingers when Mr. Feelin's temper conquered his control. The menace of his attitude was translated into action. His right hand jerked forward in an uppercut, while his left swung mightily at Philip Herondene's jaw. It was not badly done; the man knew how to handle himself. But when his blows arrived, the head at which they had been aimed was elsewhere.

Then something happened. Phil Herondene's fists moved with a scientific accuracy quite lost upon the non-technical feminine onlookers, because those movements were so quick. Mr. Feelin's legs crumpled under him, allowing him to sink to the ground as though he suddenly had become very, very weary, and to lie there in a grotesque heap.

Edith's pent-up breath escaped her in an explosive sigh of relief. Peggy clapped her hands as though she were at a play, which caused Peleg to drop the remainder of the bills he was counting into Aunt Sophronia's

lap and follow the direction of Peggy's eyes with his own. He noted Phil Herondene standing ready—quite unnecessarily—to resume the argument should his late antagonist indicate such a desire; noted Dunning, apparently about to burst forth into perfervid, oratorical denunciations of the young engineer and all his works, and above all he noted that huddled heap of legs and arms. Upon his face there dawned an appreciative grin of perfect comprehension.

"Gee!" he exclaimed. "That contractor feller ain't here. He's wanderin' somewheres in them Elysian fields what you read about, a-listenin' to the birdies sing!"

Aunt Sophronia smiled beamingly and nodded as she returned the still uncounted bills to the reticule from which she had taken them.

"Phil held the middleweight intercollegiate championship for 'most three years." she observed. "And isn't that a picture?" she added, enthusiastically. Isn't it for all the world like the one we saw Doug Fairbanks in last week?"

To both of these propositions the minion of the law yielded unqualified acquiescence.

"I'll tell the world it is, ma'am!" said he.

CHAPTER II.

THE FRAMEUP.

FURTHER conversation concerning the occurrence was rendered impossible, so far as Peleg was concerned, by the district attorney, who strode toward the group with the dignity of a tragedy king, and hailed the policeman with a commanding gesture worthy of any stage.

"Arrest that man!" he ordered, magnificently pointing toward young Herondene.

"For what?" demanded Peleg, suddenly.

"Wash—Wash Dunning!" Aunt Sophronia leaned out of her carriage and forestalled the lawyer's reply. "You look here! No—don't make me talk so loud! Come closer. There! Now listen. Peleg's not going to arrest anybody. Not now. He can't. He's seen nothing; his back was turned the whole time. You dare swear out a warrant against my nephew—well, we have four witnesses here to prove that he was assaulted by a big brute twice his size—to prove that the whole town knows already; that you'd rather lie than tell the truth any time. Now you just go and 'tend to that friend of yours; he's beginning to untangle himself."

The district attorney hesitated and glowered. "If you weren't a woman—" he began.

"If I wasn't a woman you'd have known better than to try and do as you did," she interrupted. "But there's my nephew. He isn't a woman—noticeably. If you wish to have it out with a man, talk to him!"

Turning on his heel, the lawyer strode away with what dignity he could muster. At first it seemed as though he really intended to take Aunt Sophronia at her word, and to continue the argument with Phil, but though he went in Phil's direction, he had no such intention.

Feelin, as Aunt Sophronia had said, was beginning to untangle himself. He tentatively moved his legs and arms as though he was not quite sure who really owned them. Contenting himself with a baleful glare at Phil, the lawyer helped the fallen man to stand more or less erect on legs that still were wabbly. Aunt Sophronia sighed.

"I'm afraid I've been talking like a great-great-grandaunt of mine," she apologized. "She scolded so that they ducked her in the pond, 'most a century and a half ago. But there's an old saying that you've got to fight the devil with fire. It isn't a very Christian saying, but there's a lot of truth in it. Never mind Wash Dunning now, though; here comes Phil."

They got out of the carriage to meet Phil who, now that his more imperative concerns were attended to, was running toward them. Small need was there to tell Edith to put Wash Dunning from her mind; at Phil's approach the district attorney automatically passed, so far as she was concerned, into the most remote limbo of oblivion. And for his part, he took possession of her and led her away to show her the work that occupied his mind only a little less than did she.

Peggy, after the manner of younger sisters—she was hardly sixteen—accompanied

them, disregarded but nevertheless laughing and chaffing the engaged pair with all the time-honored gibes of standardized schoolgirl wit suited to such occasions.

Aunt Sophronia, her brow furrowed and her blue eyes keener than ever, lingered behind. When she reached the great portico of the Terminal Building, she stopped, and, partly concealed by a pillar, looked back at the two men—Dunning and the contractor. They had not moved from the spot where last she had seen them. Feelin's legs had regained their steadiness now. He and the district attorney were plainly engaged in argument; an argument sullen and obstinate on Feelin's part as contrasted with the lawyer's wordy rebuttal. They were too far away for even their voices to be heard, but attitudes and gestures alike told the facts plainly enough to Aunt Sophronia's suspiciously watchful eyes.

The debate, however, soon came to an end, having concluded, so far as Aunt Sophronia was able to judge, in some sort of compromise. Together they walked away, entering an alley which would take them, by a short cut, to a point not far from the City Hall.

"Ah!" said Aunt Sophronia, and as she turned and entered the building she said "Aha" again, in a tone indicating that she saw a light glimmering at the end of her cogitations.

Yet her face had not cleared when she joined her nephew and her two nieces, present and prospective. They did not note her approach. They were standing, with rapt attention, before one of the walls, in which a long, irregular crack had showed itself.

"It's the foundations—just as I told your father, Edith," Phil was saying. "They're rotten—rubble, laid on mud, I suppose. But every time I tried to prove it, somebody higher up—I never could learn exactly who—interfered to prevent. Now it proves itself—by this crack. Yet that grafting crook of a Feelin tries to tell me that it's only a superficial flaw in the plaster, and, because he can't get any money until I sign the estimates, he wants me to certify that his work's properly done. When I wouldn't he threatened to punch my face."

"Yes," giggled Peggy. "He tried to. We saw him. A college education is *some* good after all. I never realized it until now."

What Phil said about the defective work was an oft-told tale to Aunt Sophronia, but now that crack had come to lend this tale a new and acute meaning.

"Without tearing down the whole concern, and beginning all over again, can't anything be done to put the buildin' right, Phil?" she asked.

"Yes," answered Phil. "If any one would spend the time and money to do it."

"How much money would it take?" was Aunt Sophronia's next question.

Phil shrugged his shoulders and flung both hands wide in a gesture that signified indefinite enormity.

"Do you s'pose that say, five thousand dollars would do it?" Aunt Sophronia suggested.

"No, Aunt Sophy," he replied, "I don't know how much it would take, for I can't tell exactly what's needed. But five thousand dollars wouldn't do it; it would take a lot more than five thousand. And I doubt if Feelin would be willing to replace those foundations anyway, if he could help it, even leaving money out of the question, for fear it would show him up for what he is. But let's forget that now. Let's go and have a look at the yards. We're laying track—but you needn't look so scared, Aunt Sophy. Nobody'll drop a rail on your toes. I won't let 'em."

The knowledge that Edith was here, with him, on the work that he loved, once more was mounting to Phil's head with a sort of intoxication. But now his gay, inane chatter failed utterly to elicit its usual placid response on the part of Aunt Sophronia. She shook her head.

"No," said she. "You children can go, but I have some matters to look up in the library; and then," she added, with a twisted little smile, "there are some other things that I want to talk over with Peter on the way."

This was a long-established family joke and, as Aunt Sophronia knew it would, it raised a laugh, under cover of which she made her escape. She wrote "City Hall"

on the pad that Peter extended to her, and as she settled herself in her seat, the carriage pattered sedately away in the desired direction. As it drew from comparative quiet into a sound of traffic that rendered her voice inaudible, she began the "consultation" with Peter.

"Peter," she addressed the broad, stolid and highly respectable back of her ancient coachman, as it loomed before her on the box, "Peter, I always knew, of course, that this man Feelin wasn't running straight. And I knew very well, without having to hear Phil say so, that the money he made by scamping his work would have to be divided with somebody higher up than he is. Probably he has to divide it with several somebodies. We can't even guess who all those somebodies are, Peter, but after what we saw and heard to-day we know pretty well who one of 'em is, don't we?"

Here she paused, as though for a reply. If silence signifies assent, as proverbially supposed, then Peter's sphinxlike back assented. Aunt Sophronia went on:

"Wash Dunning is the man we mean, Peter. But he isn't very high up. He's only a go-between, doing the dirty work of those above him. This much is plain to be seen. And besides, that's the kind of a man he is, and always was. So we've about made up our minds, Peter, that Dunning is the man we'll have to deal with—haven't we?"

Aunt Sophronia proceeded to explain.

"You see, Peter, I hoped that for the sake of my dear boy Phil, I might pay Feelin some extra money every so often, and so make him do the work as it ought to be done. I thought that five thousand dollars ought to be enough to start with, and I had that much all ready to offer him. But now I can see that the five thousand won't be near enough, and that Dunning, and not Feelin, is the man I must talk to. I'll pay more than five thousand if I have to—anything more, within reason—but I'm afraid they won't make that bargain. They'll be scared to do it, even if I could pay their price. We'll try and bribe those folks to be honest, Peter, but if we can't—we'll just have to fight 'em, that's all. The question is, how shall we begin that fight?"

To this problem Peter's back seemed to offer no solution. But with unabated satisfaction in the wisdom of her silent oracle, Aunt Sophronia resumed.

"No, we can't tell just how we shall begin that fight. But if we think hard enough, Peter, we shall find a way. And when we do, it will be a fight—a real fight! We won't stop at trifles, Peter. If the devil wants fire, he'll get it. He'll get plenty of it. He can depend upon that!"

Had Peter, or had anyone else, seen the steely glint in Aunt Sophronia's eyes as she uttered those last words, it is probable that such a person would have been moved to an assent far more emphatic than that which mere silence could give. But there was no one who could see, and in a moment the glint had been replaced with a look of pleased surprise, for she saw that the district attorney, still accompanied by Feelin, the contractor, was about to mount the steps of the City Hall.

No street cars ran from the Terminal Building to the City Hall. The two men therefore had been obliged to walk the entire distance; and though they took a short cut, Aunt Sophronia had overtaken them.

"'Talk of the devil and he'll appear,'" she quoted. "There he is—with his friend. Stop, Peter, and let me out!"

Peter stopped, not because he heard the command, but because he had reached his destination. Alighting, Aunt Sophronia waved her hand in a signal that Peter understood and obeyed by taking the horses to a spot where some buildings sheltered them from the breeze, which bore a trace of autumnal keenness. Aunt Sophronia ran up the steps, as light and swift as Peggy herself. The two men were disappearing around the first corner of a double turn in which a corridor ended. She sped down the length of that corridor and was herself about to turn when the sound of a voice brought her to an abrupt stand. It was Dunning who spoke.

"I'll fix it, I tell you. I'll do it now. But for the love of Mike, Feelin, don't go blathering all you know out here in the corridor, as you started to do just now. And we mustn't be seen together in my office. Here!" he continued, opening a door and—

presumably—looking within. "Duck into the library and wait for me. There's no one there. There never is. I won't be gone half an hour."

Without waiting for an answer the speaker's footfalls passed on, around the second turn. After an instant those of Feelin followed them.

"Say, Dunning, listen!" Aunt Sophronia heard him say. "I want to wash up and get a drink. I need it. But I'll be back and meet you—"

Aunt Sophronia heard no more. As the short space between the first and second turn in the corridor for the moment was left untenanted, she had rounded it quickly, "ducked" into the library and closed the door behind her. As she stood within she heard Feelin, a moment later, repass the door, on his quest of liquid refreshment. Then, for the first time since her entrance, she breathed.

A musty, dusty place was the library in which Aunt Sophronia had concealed herself. Both a librarian and an assistant were employed by the city, but these positions were regarded merely as minor political gifts, and were used as such. Rarely, therefore, were those who held them to be seen. Save for Aunt Sophronia, or of some one like her, bent upon historical research, the place was empty and unguarded.

Aunt Sophronia paused by the librarian's desk and sniffed, with a New England housekeeper's disgust at the dust that had been allowed to accumulate there. Inspired by her newly awakened interest in local practical politics, other things, previously passed by without thought, now took on a new significance; the absurd profusion of expensive electroliers, for example, and a safe which she had noticed on her last visit, months before, which now, as then, stood swathed in the heavy wrapping paper the factory used to protect it.

These things spelled graft, pure and simple. Aunt Sophronia realized this now. But who was responsible? That was something she didn't know—but something she determined to find out.

At the far end of an alcove a short sub-alcove opened at an angle so sharp that even its opening was invisible until one reached it. Aunt Sophronia was well acquainted with this sub-alcove, for it contained the records pertaining to her family. She went there now.

A window looked out of the sub-alcove. From a shelf Aunt Sophronia selected a book, not on account of its subject matter, but for its size, and laid it before her on the sill of that window. Should she be discovered and attacked, she intended to throw that book through the window pane, toss her reticule containing the five thousand dollars after it, and then scream for help.

Her simple but still fairly efficient preparations for defense thus having been made, Aunt Sophronia had nothing to do but wait—to wait interminably as it seemed to her until at last the door opened to admit Feelin, the contractor, and closed behind him.

Aunt Sophronia knew that it was Feelin. She knew it somehow by the way he moved about, by the way he spat and by the scent of a cigar which he presently lighted. With a sense of loathing rather than fear at his proximity, she vaguely wondered why, with the results of his graft, he did not purchase less malodorous cigars. She had not long to wonder, however. Soon the door opened and closed for the second time, and the entrance of the district attorney told her that her vigil at last was drawing to its close.

"Anybody been in here?" asked Dunning.

"Naw!" growled the contractor, impatiently. "Get down to business. What's doin'?"

Before speaking, Dunning released the spring latch of the door. Its snap, bringing with it the realization that she now was locked in with these two men, away from the possibility of immediate help from without, sounded like the crack of doom to Aunt Sophronia's ears. She made no move, however, but listened intently for the reply, which Dunning then made.

"It'll be all right, just as I said. You're to come across—"

"Like blue blazes I'll come across!" cried the contractor. "Listen here, Dunning! I told you before that I wouldn't come across with another nickel while that young pup is on the job, gummin' up the

game—and that goes! What do we want with Ayres & Herondene, anyway? Why wasn't the work took out o' their hands long ago, like I wanted, and give to somebody that would be reasonable? Say!"

"It wasn't taken away from them because to do so without a mighty good excuse would cause a holler we couldn't any of us stand for—as you ought to know without asking," returned the district attorney. "Now, don't behave like a crazy fool, Feelin, but listen to me. I grant that you're right about this young Herondene. The Big Boss grants it; I've just been talking with him. The Herondene boy has got to go, but the only way to get rid of him is to frame him. To do that will cost money—your money. As I tried to say before, you're to come across with the regular payment. That money will be used to frame the Herondene boy—every cent of it!"

"Five thousand dollars is a heap o' dough to use in framin' a kid like that," grumbled Feelin.

"To frame a kid who has an old-maid aunt who owns half this town?" was the contemptuous rejoinder. "You're talking jazz-stuff, Feelin—and you know it! Besides, the money doesn't come out of your pocket. It's your regular payment, that the Big Boss is sacrificing to make good to you. So hand it over!"

"When's the kid to be framed?" demanded the contractor, suspiciously.

"Right away, of course. So as to have a new man in charge in time to handle this monthly estimate."

"That's all right. But how am I to know that after you get your hooks on this money, you'll hand it over to the Big Boss?"

"You make me tired!" snorted Dunning. "Now, see here! I take these bills—five of them—and mark them for identification by drawing a neat pair of spectacles on the pictures of the old gink—Fillmore, isn't it?—on each bill. Now, if you won't trust me, go and open that safe. There'll be a tag, with the combination on it, hanging on the knob, as there is on all new safes. I haven't seen that tag; it's under the paper. Lock the bills in the safe, put the tag in this envelope, and we'll go together and mail it to the Big Boss himself. Will *that* satisfy you?"

Apparently this plan was satisfactory. Aunt Sophronia heard the tearing of wrapping paper, and shortly afterward the faint clink of the combination dial as it was twirled, locking the safe.

"Is that all I've got to do?" asked Feelin, still sullen.

"For the present, yes," was the reply. "We—the Big Boss and I—will see that the bills are planted and that Herondene is pinched. All you'll have to do is to swear at the trial that the firm of Ayres & Herondene refused to pass your work until you came across with graft, that you did come across, and that the marked bills found on Herondene's person is the graft in question. Now, get that, and get it right, for we mustn't take another chance of being seen together. Understand, or must I—"

The library door slammed, shutting off the last few words, but Aunt Sophronia desired to hear no more, just then. Emerging from the alcove, she went and listened to make sure that the two men had gone away.

"And yet some folks say that there's no such thing as an overrulin' Providence!" she sighed.

Then her lips set hard, in a thin, straight line, as she left the library and softly closed the door behind her.

CHAPTER III.

HER DOWNWARD PATH.

"GEORGE WASHINGTON DUNNING and Lafayette Feelin," mused Aunt Sophronia, as her two fat horses, a trifle more briskly, now that they were on their homeward way, pattered over the smooth pavement. "Isn't it odd, Peter," she continued, "how often it happens that the greatest scalawags are named after such men? Isn't it enough to make 'em turn in their graves?"

Peter's back doubtless managed to convey the impression that such a misuse of their names was enough to cause the two great patriots to perform any number of post-mortem revolutions. At all events, Aunt Sophronia went on.

" Those marked bills are to be ' planted,' and after Phil is ' pinched,' that contractor-man, Lafe Feelin, is to swear that they—that my Phil and Edward Ayres, of all the folks in the world—demanded it as a bribe. We don't know who the Big Boss is, Peter, and we're not quite sure what's meant by ' planted ' and ' pinched.' But," she added, after a moment of reflection, " if they haven't *got* those bills, they *can't* plant 'em or do anything else with 'em. That's one sure thing!"

Aunt Sophronia did not continue the discussion verbally, but instead translated her words into action. Straightening and furling the diminutive parasol, she prodded Peter with it. Understanding perfectly what was wanted, he drove to the curb, stopped, and produced his pad and pencil.

Aunt Sophronia wrote, with an air of defiance more marked than before, and returned the pad. Peter read the words it contained. Disbelieving his eyes, he rubbed them with his whip-hand and read them again. They had not altered. So he turned his head, grown as gray as her own while in her service, and stared back at her with a frown of amazed disapproval. Aunt Sophronia frowned and nodded fiercely. So he read the message for the third time, and still his eyes saw the three words Aunt Sophronia had written:

Phelim O'Rourke's saloon.

Peter shook his head. His world had turned topsy-turvy. In a sort of waking dream he turned and drove along another street, one that led to a lower part of the city—lower in every sense of the word.

Aunt Sophronia, who had dreaded this conflict with Peter to a degree that only those who know both old New England ladies and old New England " help " can understand, sighed with grateful relief now that the conflict was over, or at least suspended. Her air of defiance, however, remained undiminished. She was defying everybody, including herself. As the streets grew more dingy and tawdry, revealing themselves even to her unaccustomed eyes as the abodes of vice, suggested a simile which served partially to express her mental attitude.

" I may be on the downward path—any way you look at it," said she, obstinately, to Peter's disapproving back. " But I don't care whether I am or not. Phelim O'Rourke was as decent a stable boy as we ever had, Peter Sullivan—as you yourself said. And to get what I want just now I'd go a lot farther along the downward path than the spot where Phelim O'Rourke is likely to be."

The spot where Aunt Sophronia's landau soon afterward stopped did not seem to her, at first sight, a desperately bad place. It is true that Aunt Sophronia disapproved of saloons, yet she could not but remember that in her younger days there were many people who sold liquor to their neighbors and who still were reckoned as excellent citizens. The saloon of Phelim O'Rourke looked both clean and prosperous—as, indeed, it was. It was centrally situated in the city's underworld; a district of which, politically and otherwise, Phelim O'Rourke was the uncrowned but unquestioned sovereign, and the habitués of his saloon were naturally those who composed his court. But Aunt Sophronia could not be expected fully to understand facts of this nature. Had she understood them to the fullest possible degree her conduct, however, would have been exactly the same. That is the kind of an Aunt Sophronia she was.

The fact that Miss Herondene's carriage was stopped at O'Rourke's saloon was news that spread through the Butt-End District, as it was locally called, with uncanny swiftness. A very little later, as Aunt Sophronia well knew, this news would have spread over the entire town, reaching each and every one of her associates and rivals. If she was disturbed by this knowledge she allowed no sign to appear in her placid, inscrutable face. O'Rourke's battle-scarred countenance, on the other hand, as he came running out to the carriage before she could alight, wore an expression of astonishment, not to say dismay, excelled only by that which had appeared on the face of Peter when first her destination had been announced.

" For the love av heaven, Miss Sophronia—here!" he exclaimed, as though appealing to some unseen being for confirmation of

the fact; then, addressing Aunt Sophronia more directly, he asked, anxiously: "Is there annything wrong, ma'am? Is there annything I can do?"

Aunt Sophronia smiled graciously and shook hands. O'Rourke once had been a household retainer of hers. "Yes, Phelim," she replied. "I think you may be able to help me a great deal. But I'll have to tell you about it. Is there a place where I can talk to you without other folks hearing what I say?"

Once again Phelim looked wildly about him for inspiration. He looked last at Peter, but the face of his erstwhile chief was set into a wooden mask of disdainful vacuity which seemed to preclude the possibility of a suggestion. Phelim scratched his own red head with slightly better results.

"Well, ma'am," he said, doubtfully, "there's a back room there—" with a nod toward the saloon.

"The very thing!" replied Aunt Sophronia, heartily.

Phelim ran ahead to clear the back room in question of any casual occupants, and to close all its doors. Aunt Sophronia followed him, and composedly seated herself. Once again Phelim was assailed by a question, and again he scratched his head and decided it in the affirmative.

"Is there—wud ye do me the honor, ma'am, to take a little somethin'?" he asked, bashfully.

Aunt Sophronia, he noted with relief, was not at all offended. To offer hospitality seemed to her quite the natural and proper thing for him to do. But she was not given to alcoholic stimulants.

"A glass of water, Phelim, if you'll be so good," said she. "I've had rather a trying time, and it has made me thirsty."

Phelim strode to the door leading into the barroom, jerked it open and gave the order. It took him only an instant, but the keen eyes of his visitor could see many things in an instant of time. Everything visible from her seat was seen and mentally catalogued, especially a pair of eyes that met her own from a table just outside the door.

There were two pairs of eyes at that table, set, of course, in as many faces. One face, however, was quite unknown to Aunt Sophronia, and therefore was merely noted and passed by. The other was one she had known, as she knew so many faces in the town, from the time of its first appearance on earth.

"Phelim," she asked, as O'Rourke returned, "isn't that Jimmy Wilson in there, at that table?"

"Why—why, yes, ma'am," Phelim hesitated. "I think it is."

"You know whether it is or not," returned the old lady, sharply. "You knew Jimmy when he was a little mite of a boy. He's the son of Libby, who's been with me always. I've heard that he's taking after his father, and getting into bad ways, and I fear it's true. That mustn't be allowed, Phelim; it would break his mother's heart. You must see to it, as well as you can."

"I will, ma'am," answered Phelim.

He meant it; that fact was so plain from his manner that Aunt Sophronia felt justified in passing on to her more personal affairs.

"Phelim," she asked, "what does it mean to have a man 'pinched?' What does it mean to 'plant' money on a man in order to 'frame' him?"

Wonderingly, but competently, Phelim imparted the desired information. Aunt Sophronia nodded, her face becoming grim.

"Who's the 'Big Boss'?" she pursued.

This was a question that Phelim was not so well prepared to answer offhand. His life had taught him the folly of rashly committing himself.

"Well, ma'am, that depends upon who it is that's spakin'," he replied. "The main guy—the head man, that is—of anny business is the 'Big Boss' to thim what's under him, ye see."

"Yes," agreed Aunt Sophronia. "I can see that. So I'll just tell you the whole story, and then you can give me the advice, and maybe the help, I came to ask for."

Phelim's face grew doggedly angry in her behalf, but also doubtful, as he heard her story.

"Now do you know who the 'Big Boss' is?" she asked, as she finished.

"I fear I can make a close guess, ma'am," he answered. "It lies betune no more than two or three, annyhow. 'Twud

be harrdly fair—wud it now?—if I was to name names wit'out being certain. The thing what bothers me, Miss Sophronia, is that these men is all too high up for me to touch—till eliction toime comes. Yet somethin' has to be done."

"The first thing to be done is to prevent their framin' my nephew, Master Phil," said she. "Of course, Phelim, I don't know much about such things, but that can't be so difficult. I was thinkin' as I came along that if those men—if Wash Dunning and the Big Boss—didn't have those bills, they couldn't use 'em to frame my nephew with or for anything else. So the thing to do is to get the bills."

"'Twud help, ma'am," conceded Phelim. "It wud give us time to turrn around, if it did nothin' more—an' toime is what we need. But how to get the bills, without burglarizin' the safe, is something I don't see."

"Why, there isn't any other way," returned Aunt Sophronia, with slight surprise at his stupidity. "That's mostly why I came to you. Isn't there some nice burglar—one who knows his business—that you could recommend, Phelim?"

Phelim's jaw dropped. He was game, however, and nevertheless managed to reply with more or less coherence.

"Well—well, ma'am, mebbe—if I looked around a bit I moight foind wan," he admitted.

"Then find him," commanded Aunt Sophronia. "And do it now, please. For as you say, Phelim, we haven't much time."

Phelim had not far to look, it appeared. Once more he went to the door, and as he opened it Aunt Sophronia noted that Jimmy Wilson, doubtless on account of having seen her, had disappeared. Jimmy's former companion, however, still remained in his seat, and it was to him that Phelim's summons was addressed.

"Spike!" he called. "Spike Creach! Come here; ye're wanted."

It was thoughtless of Phelim to use those last words, and for this his state of mental agitation must be his excuse. For to gentlemen of Mr. Creach's profession the fact of being wanted generally implies the police. Spike arose, mentally reviewing certain misdeeds that might have overtaken him, but so far as Aunt Sophronia was concerned, feeling gloriously virtuous.

It was only the preceding day that Jimmy Wilson had proposed that he, Spike, acting on information to be given by Jimmy, should make a professional visit at Aunt Sophronia's house; but Spike had scornfully rejected the proposal. Spike was a bank burglar, and as such any job of porch-climbing or the like, no matter how remunerative, would not only be out of his line, but would also be utterly beneath his dignity.

He had, it is true, every reason to believe that Jimmy had subsequently made arrangements with another gentleman, who specialized in that sort of thing. But that, of course, was in no way Spike's affair. Even so, for a moment he meditated flight.

"I said to come here! Did ye hear me?" cut in the voice of Phelim.

There was no help for it; Phelim O'Rourke was far more to be feared than the police. The door closed behind him, and for a little he and Aunt Sophronia looked at each other with mutual and equal curiosity. A burglar, she decided, after all looked very much like anybody else. His face might be hard, perhaps, but she would far rather trust its owner than, for example, Wash Dunning or that Feelin man. And Spike, as he saw a little white-haired lady smiling pleasantly at him, found, to his own considerable astonishment that the experience was rather a pleasant one—also unique.

The present meeting, however, was for purposes neither social nor sociological. Aunt Sophronia proceeded to broach its object.

"You see," she said, quite as though addressing a plumber or any other tradesman, "there's a little job of burglary I want to have done. In the library of the City Hall there's a safe. In the safe there are five one thousand-dollar bills, and nothing else. The library's on the first floor, and there's never anybody in it, so they shouldn't be hard to get. Of course, I'll pay a fair price for the work," she added, fishing about in her reticule. "Five thousand dollars ought to be enough, I should think."

"What? How's that?" cried the bur-

glar. There seemed to him that there must be something fishy about this proposition. He could not understand it at all.

"Five thousand dollars," repeated Aunt Sophronia, unperturbed. "You see," she went on to explain, "it isn't the money I'm after. I want those particular bills."

Aunt Sophronia laid the money on the table. Phelim took it, counted it and stuffed it into his own pocket.

"You'll get it when you've done your job," said he to Creach. "Are you on?"

Creach nodded, and then asked, "Where d'you want the goods delivered?"

"At my house," answered Aunt Sophronia. "And they must be there tonight—as early as possible."

"But you're giving a party there tonight," the burglar objected.

Aunt Sophronia, lifting both hands, let them fall with a gesture of self-reproval of her oversight.

"Well, may I never—if I didn't forget every single thing about it!" she cried; then added, with quick suspicion. "But how did you know I was giving a party?"

"Jim Wilson told me. The caterer that's to serve the supper took him on as an extra waiter," answered Creach. Aunt Sophronia beamed.

"I do declare I'm glad!" she exclaimed. "So Jimmy's honestly tryin' to do regular work! His father's dead, you know, and Jimmy's his mother's only child. She isn't well—hasn't been for years. Her heart's bad, and grieving makes it worse. But this news, when I tell her, will do her more good than all the doctors that ever was!"

Her own affairs, for the moment forgotten, Aunt Sophronia stopped to gloat over the joy she was to bring to her old servant. Then the sight of the two waiting men recalled her to the matter in hand.

"Farty or no party, you'll have to bring that money to my house," she decided. "Come by the side door and go into the first room on your left."

Nodding, Spike strode away. Aunt Sophronia rose, as did Phelim.

"Miss Sophronia, ma'am," said the latter, earnestly, "I want that you shouldn't worry about them mutts what's tryin' to double-cross you an' Master Phil. Now that we got a little time to spare, we'll handle them all right. And I want you to know that I'm standin' back of you in this matter and any other from now till the time that hell freezes over and the devil goes skatin'. And that goes!"

So evident was his sincerity that Aunt Sophronia did not reprove his lurid expression, but shook hands and cordially thanked her former retainer.

CHAPTER IV

REUNION.

THE old Herondene place, overlooking the city as a feudal castle overlooks a town that has nestled, originally for protection, at the foot of the eminence upon which the castle stands, was first a stone farmhouse of substantial build and hospitably generous size. But in the course of time, and especially in Aunt Sophronia's time, one addition had followed another until it was like a small, close-standing village in itself; a straggling, oak-shaded island, in a smooth, green-velvet sea.

Riding home, Aunt Sophronia viewed it with satisfaction.

The danger to Phil, she felt, was averted, if not overcome. The "party" which was to take place that evening was the first large and formal affair that the old Herondene place had seen for many years. It was a dance, given as an official announcement of Phil's betrothal to Edith. The preparations, now complete, had been going on for days.

Edith's family was coming over from Barrasdale, where she lived. Edith's mother had died when she was a child, so there were only three of them in all; Edith, her father, and Jack, her brother, a trifle younger than she. In consequence Edith had at first lived with relatives, then at fashionable boarding schools, and, later, had studied abroad. Having been away so much, she did not know Aunt Sophronia well.

Edith was the only one of the three, however, who could be called a new acquaintance of Aunt Sophronia. For Jack, who had been a freshman in the same college

with Phil, when the latter was a senior, was so accustomed to spending his vacations in the old place that he regarded it very much as he would a second home. And while his father and Aunt Sophronia had seen but little of each other in late years, they were old friends. Very old and good friends—always. Aunt Sophronia's heart glowed at the thought that Edward Ayres might already have arrived, during her absence, while her home, unchanged save for its slow growth through so many years, appeared actually to have taken on an air of festivity since she left it. It seemed to smile as it was flooded with the autumn sun.

Aunt Sophronia was right in her surmise; her two guests had arrived. Jack kissed her affectionately as he had been accustomed to do. His father, holding Aunt Sophronia's hand, thereupon, and at the top of his voice, expressed unbounded jealousy and envy of his son thus privileged, and paid her so many compliments, of so extravagant a nature, that her cheeks actually took on a delicate tinge of pink. Peggy saw and called merciless attention to her aunt's blush.

Then the young people teased her, and it was all very noisy and foolish and jolly as a meeting of old friends after a long absence ought to be. And while it was still in progress Aunt Sophronia made her escape, laughing, and ran, like a girl, to her rooms.

She continued to smile. How like a grownup boy, she reflected, Ned Ayres was—and had always been. But all men, she fancied, were pretty much the same in that respect. Good boys or bad boys, as the case might be, but still boys; just "children of a larger growth." Yes, all of them, even Phelim and that burglar.

Thinking of Phelim reminded her of the news of Jimmy Wilson that she had brought back with her for the comfort of Libby, Jimmy's mother. So she rang for Libby. Libby did not resemble the conventional maid at all. She made no inquiries as to what Miss Herondene desired. Instead she stated facts and issued commands.

"You're tuckered clean out," said she. "You never *would* remember that you ain't so young as you was, thirty years ago. What you want—and what you're goin' to do—is to have your hair brushed, get into a wrapper and then lie down and take a nap."

"But Libby," remonstrated Aunt Sophronia, "I'm not really tired, and I can't spare the time to take a nap now. There's—"

"I know there's comp'ny in the house," interrupted Libby, quite unmoved. "But there's also a flock of girls, come to call on Miss Edith; and unless Mr. Ned Ayres has changed a lot more'n I think he has, he's down there among 'em right this minute, surrounded by the prettiest ones of the lot and actin' as much like a kid as any of 'em."

That there was more than likely to be much truth in this surmise, Aunt Sophronia was obliged mentally to concede. Moreover, she was tired; now that the moment of excitement had passed, the sense of her fatigue returned.

"Libby," she began, when the hair-brushing was well under way, "to-day I had occasion to go down to Phelim O'Rourke's saloon."

She glanced at Libby's face, the reflection of which she could see in the mirror before her; but the expression on that face indicated only that nothing Miss Sophronia might take into her head to do would greatly surprise Libby. This was not encouraging; but then, Aunt Sophronia was not a Yankee for nothing. She continued.

"I was sittin' in the back room of that saloon, talking to Phelim—"

"Did they rob you of that five thousand dollars you had with you?" Libby interrupted.

"No. And you know they didn't—or you would know if you would only use the sense God gave you," replied Aunt Sophronia, testily. "I used that money. Not in exactly the way I intended to use it, but for pretty much the same purpose."

"If you used it while you was in that saloon, I guess you was robbed of it all right," observed Libby. "But you was sayin' somethin'?"

"I was trying to say something," was the retort. "I was trying to say that when

Phelim opened the door of that room I saw your boy, Jimmy, sitting outside. I didn't speak to Jimmy; I didn't have a chance. But a friend of his that I had some business with—"

"Creach?" demanded Libby.

So sudden and so unexpected was the mention of that name that it gave Aunt Sophronia a start.

"Yes—Creach," she admitted, doggedly. "Not that it matters much who it was. Creach told me that Jimmy has gone and hunted up a job—honest work. He struck Luden—the caterer, you know—and Luden took him as one of his extra men for to-night. With Jimmy's bringing up, here in this house, he ought to do well at such work, and the work, I'm told, is 'most always to be had. Aren't you glad, Libby? I thought you would be—that you must be—to hear news like that. To have Jimmy hunt for honest work, instead of hanging around billiard rooms and stables—"

"Miss Sophrony, if it was like you think, I'd be so glad I'd fall on my knees and give thanks. But it isn't, and Jimmy'll work for one night, maybe, but he won't work again, till his money's gone. Do you know who this man Creach is?"

Then, so sure was Libby that her mistress could not know, she proceeded to impart the information without waiting for a reply.

"He's a thief, Miss Sophrony. A robber and a thief—or he has been, and I don't believe he has changed so much since he came out of jail. And he ain't a friend of Jimmy's—not what you'd call a friend, good or bad. Creach wouldn't have a friend like Jimmy. He thinks too much of himself. They met in the awful prison, but what my Jimmy was sent there for was no more'n boyish devilment. Creach was a criminal—a professional. And Jimmy—that's the worst of it—Jimmy makes a hero out of him. So he hangs around and admires him, and tries to imitate him, like he used to do with the players down to the ball park, when he was little."

"But the boy loves you, Libby," protested Miss Sophronia, now openly distressed. "He's always been good and sweet when I've seen him with you."

"He always is good an' sweet, when he's with me," assented Libby, her face softening. "He loves his mother, Miss Sophrony, as you said. That's what's kept him from goin' entirely wrong, up to now. But with this heart o' mine I won't be with him so very much longer, and might leave him at any time—as you know. There! Your hair is brushed an' braided. Now you go an' lie down. I'll call you as soon as there's any need for you to be called."

The first and the last portions of Libby's speech had been uttered in exactly the same tone. Both were simple, unemotional statements of facts, or of intentions so certain to be carried into effect that they amounted to facts. Aunt Sophronia perfectly understood this; had she been in Libby's place she would have spoken in no other manner. They were of the same race and the same generation, after all.

Aunt Sophronia lay down as Libby had commanded, but she did so largely in order to think undisturbed. She was very unhappy. What Libby had said about herself was absolutely true; that treacherous heart of hers might at any instant refuse its work, and that instant would be hastened if her anxiety about Jimmy continued.

Why, wondered Aunt Sophronia, with unusual resentment against the powers that regulate such affairs, should all this trouble and sadness obtrude itself when it was especially unwelcome—when the happiness of the entire household ought to be unclouded? Yet, at least so far as Libby was concerned, there must be a way out. Aunt Sophronia began a diligent search for that way.

For a long time Aunt Sophronia had thought of engaging a butler. Many of her friends employed butlers, and considered them indispensable. Hitherto, being governed by her inherited conservatism—she had refused to alter the routine and personnel of her household.

Jimmy Wilson, however, required help. Jimmy had been born and reared on the place. Why shouldn't she make Jimmy the butler? He had always been a bright lad. If this position were created for him, he would be in direct contact with his mother, who would instruct and guide him in his conduct as well as his work.

This, to Aunt Sophronia, was the desired solution of the problem. Unresistingly, now, with a faint smile of satisfaction on her shrewd, kindly face, she fell asleep.

CHAPTER V.

PEGGY'S DEBUT.

ON a rattan veranda settee, with her legs tucked under her, an unread book on her knees and with her big, violet-blue eyes gazing into unfathomed space, Peggy might successfully have posed for a picture that was to bear some such title as "Dreams," or "In Maiden Meditation, Fancy Free." To be sure it would be totally misleading, as titles frequently are. Nevertheless the picture would be a most attractive one.

Even Jack Ayres, who came wandering noiselessly along on the lawn close by the veranda, was conscious of its attraction. Jack was far from blind to feminine attractiveness, though he was, to all intents and purposes, just a boy, whose boyishness was for the moment somewhat overlaid with a sense of his own dignity and importance, imparted by a brand-new certificate of admittance to the bar. Peggy, to him, had always been merely Phil Herondene's kid sister, leggy and sometimes in need of a tooth, who used to follow him around, when permitted, with the frank, unregarded, but unbounded, adoration such as only a small girl is capable of showing to a somewhat older lad.

It requires very strong evidence indeed abruptly to change such an impression, but Peggy had changed this one of Jack's. He even permitted himself to wonder in just what manner she now regarded him. But he intended to take jolly good care that she didn't find out that he had changed in any way.

Peggy, who saw Jack coming, but did not, by the faintest sign, give evidence of having seen him, sensed the change instantly, as women, of whatever age, invariably sense such things.

Bearing his resolutions in mind, Jack approached, and the two took cognizance of each other's presence.

"Hello, Peg," was his greeting.

"Hello, Jack," she replied.

"Where's everybody?" he pursued.

"Aunt Sophy's lying down, resting up for to-night. Your father has gone downtown to look up some old friends of his—I don't know who. Edith and Phil"—here Peggy scornfully wrinkled her pretty nose—"are off somewhere together, mooning and spooning, I s'pose. And I'm here."

"So I see. When do we eat?"

"We don't. Not in the usual way, that is. Things are too upset, and the caterer has commandeered the dining room and kitchen, both. But there's a supply laid up for the occasion in the pantry. Libby's going to send up trays to the rooms. Let's go and see what she's got."

This was regarded as a safe, sane and eminently practical proposal, to be adopted without the formality of a discussion. Libby was not to be found in the pantry, so they helped themselves and picnicked gloriously, seated on barrels. As she appeared now, with a generous wedge of pie in her hands, Peggy seemed to have reverted to the kid she had always been. But even so, she always was a nice kid.

"Peg," he burst forth, as a thought struck him, "what are you going to do about to-night? Will they let you come down?"

Peggy shook her head. Her big eyes filled.

"No," she said. "Aunt Sophy won't let me. I've begged her and begged her and got Edith to back me up. But she won't! Not till I'm 'out'—three years from now. You know Aunt Sophy's old-fashioned notions. You know how 'sot' she is. She just lays back her ears and won't *budge*!"

Jack perfectly understood this last statement was to be taken as figurative. What affected him was the fact that two tears overflowed Peggy's eyes, and that two others followed them. The sight moved him to make a suggestion that savored of high treason.

"Couldn't you slip down anyway?" he asked. "Wait until the shindig is well started, you know. Aunt Sophy will be so occupied with her guests that it ought to be easy to duck her."

"No use," she sighed. "What would I wear? I have party frocks, of course, but they're little-girl party frocks. In the fluttery bunch that will show up here one of them would be as conspicuous as a red-flannel wrapper. No, it's no good, Jack. I've thought and thought—I was thinking about it when you found me there on the veranda, trying to dope out a way—but I couldn't. And I *did* so want to go!"

Here she began to cry in earnest. Somehow Jack could not bear to see her cry. Without himself quite knowing how it happened, he found that his arms were around her, and that he was comforting her after the manner in which young men have comforted weeping maidens since the beginning of time. But when they came to a realizing sense of their position, the spell broke. Jack hurried away to dress. He felt very foolish. Peggy didn't feel foolish at all. Girls are different about such things.

Peggy's was a philosophical soul, in its way. Once she had quite made up her mind that what she wanted could in no possible way be obtained, she would take the next best thing and get all the fun she could out of it. That is why she was shortly to be found in Edith's room, helping Edith as she dressed for the ball, and eagerly enjoying by proxy every minute detail, from beginning to end, of the toilette which Aunt Sophronia had prevented her from trying herself.

A little before the frock itself was needed, Peggy went to fetch it from the closet in which all Edith's frocks had been hung. She did not ask which one was required, but selected the one that she herself would have chosen, a filmy affair of shimmering rose color. When she brought it forth, however, Edith smiled and shook her head.

"Not that one, dear," said she. "The black-and-silver. Yes, that. Thanks."

Peggy brought the required frock, helped Edith get into it and hooked it, moving as though in a dream, hardly realizing what she was doing. For an idea had sprung, full-fledged, into her brain. It is not difficult to guess the nature of that idea.

To Peggy it seemed ages before Edith's toilet was satisfactorily completed, and Edith, with a kiss and a word of sympathy, went downstairs, where the orchestra already was taking its place. Hardly had she departed when Peggy carefully closed the door behind her and with feverish haste began putting her ideas into execution, overcoming temptation by the simple process of yielding to it.

Tearing off her own frock, after recklessly borrowing stockings and slippers—the slippers did nicely, with a little tissue-paper stuffing in their toes—Peggy turned up her hair, secured it with commandeered hairpins and comb, then powdered her neck and shoulders and afterward donned the rose-colored frock. It was too large, certainly—very much too large—but Peggy refused to be discouraged by trifles like that. She lapped the bodice over, and with many contortions—for it fastened behind—managed temporarily to secure it with pins. Then she looked in the glass.

Being a young woman of more than ordinary intelligence, Peggy knew perfectly well that she was a very pretty girl, but she had never dreamed anything could make her so radiantly beautiful as the creature who smiled back at her from the mirror. Joy in the discovery of her beauty had added to it. Peggy felt equal to anything—even to braving Aunt Sophronia herself. No one, she was sure, would know her as she now appeared.

Notwithstanding her confidence in her radiant disguise, Peggy walked with watchful wariness as she went down the stairs. She wanted to find Jack; she desired far above all else, to see what would be her effect upon him, arrayed as she now was. Fortune favored her, for he stood, in immaculate evening dress, at the foot of the staircase. She slipped a slim arm within his. His eyes rounded, his jaw dropped. This was all that could be desired. It was delightful!

"Hush!" she whispered, before he could exclaim: "The frock is Edith's. I—I hooked it. I mean I borrowed it, and couldn't hook it because it's so big. So I had to pin it, but I couldn't reach far enough behind me to do it right, so you'll have to do it for me. Here's some pins. Come over here, by the door of the dining room. Nobody'll see us there."

So into the recessed doorway they went, and there Jack hooked Peggy's borrowed plumage, making a rather neat job of it on account of the practice which, from time to time, his sister had afforded him. As he finished, the orchestra crashed forth in a one-step. Peggy turned to Jack with shining eyes. And at that moment—alas! —there appeared Aunt Sophronia, bearing down upon them.

"Oh, splash!" cried Peggy, inelegantly. Giving Jack a little push out into the passage, she lifted the portière that closed the dining room doorway, and slipping behind it allowed the curtain to fall, concealing her.

The dining room was but dimly lighted, and at that hour, as Peggy well knew, should naturally have been empty. It was not empty, however. In it there was one man, a waiter, as the girl could tell by a napkin which, apparently from force of habit, he held under one arm. Presumably he was one of the caterer's men—probably he had been left there, Peggy thought, to guard the caterer's effects from possible thieves.

Surely, though, he was behaving in a very peculiar manner for one who is simply performing a routine duty. For he opened the long, French window that gave upon the lawn that was only four feet or so below its sill, and peered intently out into the night. Evidently he could not see what he looked for. So he stood on a chair, and she knew that he did it in order to see over a shrub that grew just outside the window. But even so he could not see what he sought. Holding the napkin to his face as though troubled with toothache, he dropped softly out of the window and vanished from Peggy's sight.

Such conduct on the part of a waiter would excuse curiosity on the part of anybody, and would excite it in a girl like Peggy. Forgetful of her borrowed raiment —forgetful of everything, save her desire to know what that man was about, she ran across the big room and jumped lightly out of the window onto the turf below.

It was a starlight night. Dimly she could see the object of her quest, still holding the napkin at his face in a way that Peggy now began to suspect might be in order to avoid recognition in any accidental encounter. He moved cautiously here and there, still seeking, though for what Peggy could not guess. He stopped short, listened, and then darted into a clump of shrubbery and vanished. Peggy also stopped, wondering. Then the cause of this sudden concealment was made plain to her.

A taxicab that was coming up the drive failed to behave in the manner that cars which brought guests were supposed to behave. For instead of going to the door it stopped some distance away, and disgorging three men, passed on into some shadows and, so far as Peggy could see, remained in those shadows. Two of its occupants also concealed themselves in shadows nearer the house. The third occupant, having seen his companions placed, went into the house.

Now mysteries are all very well in their way. Peggy had found them at times to be romantically interesting—until solved. But now she found that it is perfectly possible to have entirely too much even of an interesting thing. And certainly four men who hid in shadows and generally deported themselves in so unusual a fashion, offered more mystery than even a normally constituted schoolgirl could readily assimilate at a single dose. Moreover, she now was a little daunted, there were so many of them.

Following the man who went into the house, Peggy was relieved to see, as the porch light fell upon his face, that it was the face of G. Washington Dunning. She was surprised, for she did not remember his name on the invitation list. She knew little about the man, except that he had been with the contractor who was her brother's enemy. That fact in itself was enough, however, to place him very low in her estimation. So she made a face at him, behind his back, but nevertheless felt that if there had to be any mystery on a night like this, it was well to have the district attorney, whom she vaguely knew to be some sort of an exponent of law and order, at the bottom of it.

What Peggy now wished to do was to find Jack, tell him what she had seen and

ask his advice. With this end in view she went boldly into the house through the front door, as though she were simply a guest who had stepped outside and found herself regarded as one, so far as she was regarded at all. As no one, naturally, was looking for Peggy Herondene in any such guise, no one recognized her. Save for several admiring glances, she was unnoticed. Even Aunt Sophronia, coming from behind and overtaking her, passed her by, unnoticed.

This was the crowning triumph, but Peggy nevertheless felt that luck like this was entirely too good to last. Therefore, she watched her elderly relative with caution and some trepidation when she nearly squealed aloud with fright, for somebody had taken hold of her arm. But it was only Jack.

"Where in blazes have you been?" he demanded. "I've been looking for you everywhere!"

Peggy started to tell him, but just then the orchestra started, and he was obliged to interrupt her.

"Listen!" he said, hurriedly. "I've had to take this dance with a girl inside and the next dance with another girl. After that I'll be with you. You duck in behind that bunch of palms, there by the passage that leads to the side door. There are two chairs there, and people will think you've just sent your partner away to get a glass of water or something—if they notice you at all. So beat it—quick!"

Jack was gone, and Peggy thankfully did as she was told. The palms shaded and concealed her almost completely, and from this ambush she felt secure, as with eyes that missed no detail within their range, she watched the scene before her.

Again she caught sight of the district attorney. His eyes were fixed upon a man who was dancing with Edith and who was well known to Peggy. He was Lawrence Horton, and he was the mayor of the city. He was young—for a mayor, that is. In a way he was good looking—very. But Peggy didn't like him at all. She would have found it difficult to say exactly why, but she didn't.

Perhaps the fact that in some occult manner Peggy knew that this young mayor had been Phil's rival for Edith's favor, and that if he could, he still would be, had something to do with this dislike. Certainly the dislike was increased as she saw Dunning catch the mayor's eyes, and noted the look of understanding that passed between them. It was true, of course, that a district attorney might conceivably have tidings to impart to a mayor of a nature so urgent that they could not wait. But anyway, Peggy felt that in encouraging Lawrence Horton so far as to dance with him, Edith was distinctly to blame.

The dance came to an end. As soon as he could leave his partner, Horton reappeared, to talk eagerly with Dunning. To Peggy's sharp eyes it was evident that their conversation developed with acrimony, and that toward its end something very like consternation descended upon them both. And then came Aunt Sophronia.

The Aunt Sophronia who now appeared was not at all the Aunt Sophronia Peggy usually knew—nor, for that matter, as even Phelim O'Rourke and Creach, the burglar, had known her. She now was emphatically Miss Herondene, of the Herondene place, and all that this implied. She spoke to Dunning, and though Peggy could hear no word, the girl knew that English and accent alike were impeccably correct. For Aunt Sophronia, like many people who have lived long in one place ordinarily allowed her speech to become more or less affected by the prevalent vernacular, but when for any reason the status of Miss Herondene was forced upon her, the verbiage of her caste automatically returned.

After a few words, Aunt Sophronia came toward the passage near which Peggy was sitting. Aunt Sophronia was dressed in black brocade, with old lace and still older rose-cut diamonds that had been her great-grandmother's wedding gift. She was far from being a tall woman, yet somehow she made the district attorney seem very small and mean by comparison. It was not costume that caused this impression. It was because she was Miss Herondene.

She and Dunning entered a room—the library—which opened upon this passage. Here, a moment later, they were joined by

Mr. Ayres and Phil, while Horton, the mayor, hung undecidedly in the passage outside. From the tips of her satin-clad toes Peggy longed to know what was happening in that room. She had almost decided to risk everything to find out when the second dance ended and, a moment later, Jack appeared, making his way toward her ambush. Before he could reach it however his sister intercepted him.

"Have you seen Phil?" asked Edith.

"Yes. Ten minutes ago. He went into the library," answered Jack.

Edith started to go down the passage. Jack reached Peggy's hiding place. She had risen to meet him when a shot rang out. As though its bullet had cut all wires, every light vanished, leaving the house in black darkness.

CHAPTER VI.

MR. CREACH.

As Mr. Spike Creach left O'Rourke's saloon in order to make certain necessary preparations for the work that Aunt Sophronia had given him to do, he was actually smiling. He had come in contact with all kinds of people in the course of his career, but this little, white-haired lady, who was so primly old-fashioned, but who took Spike and his line of business in such a casually matter-of-fact way, was a sort new to him. He was amused by her and he liked her.

When Spike reached the library in the City Hall he had no intention of operating at once. He had come only to look over the ground. But he found the short stretch of corridor from which the library opened unoccupied. No one could see him. So he stepped quickly within, and closed the door behind him. He did not lock that door. As a citizen, he had as much right to be there as any one else; a right of which he was perfectly well aware.

With quick and practiced eyes he noted his surroundings. He did not, it is true, discover the alcove that had hidden Aunt Sophronia, for he did not approach it, but there was little else that escaped him. Taking a book at random from a shelf, he opened it and laid it on the librarian's desk, so that upon the approach of a footstep he could pick it up instantly, and appear to be absorbed in its contents. Then, kneeling, he placed his ear against the safe, and with infinite pains, began to turn the combination dial.

Not many men can operate in this manner, without the use of clumsy and incriminating burglar's tools, but Spike Creach was favored above most of his fellows with the necessary sensitiveness of touch and hearing. One after another he sensed the tumblers of the lock as they fell into their appointed slots. He turned the knob, and the door swung open at his pull. The bills were there, as the little old lady had said they would be. He counted them, put them in his pocket and laughed as he closed the safe door and locked it. Never before had he found his professional work so easy as this.

Then the laugh vanished from his face. Footsteps were approaching. To be found in this place now that the bills were in his possession was a very different affair than it had been when they were in the safe. He had made his plans, however, to cover just such a contingency as this. Placing one foot on the edge of a bookshelf, he waited, listening. The footsteps passed the door of the district attorney's office and still came on. There was no place, now, for them to go, except to the library. Placing his hands on the coping of the set of shelves, he vaulted neatly to the top, and with a smothered oath at the accumulated dust he found there, flung himself prone as a hand turned the knob of the door and a man stepped quickly inside.

Spike lay motionless, only partly hidden by the coping of the book shelves. He might have been seen had anyone looked for a hidden occupant of the room, but he knew that no one would—and no one did. The man who entered had eyes and thoughts only for the business in hand. It was Lawrence Horton who came—the mayor of the city.

Going direct to the safe, Horton pulled from his waistcoat pocket the tag that had hung on the safe door, and which Dunning and Feelin had removed and sent to him

by special delivery; a possibility Aunt Sophronia had overlooked.

The short, autumn day was nearing its close, and the light was beginning to fade. Horton had trouble in reading the numbers of the combination. At first he read one of them incorrectly, and cursed impatiently as the safe refused to open. Spike, from his point of observation on top of the shelves, chuckled noiselessly. This was a joke exactly to his taste. With the keenest pleasure he awaited the opening of the door. In his mind he anticipated the vain and puzzled search that Horton made through the bare compartments of that new and empty safe, yet he enjoyed the sight none the less when the search happened as he pictured it.

Straightening, Horton stood for a moment, frowning in troubled perplexity; then simply closed the safe door and departed as he had come.

Spike was disappointed. Many men when alone, and confronted by some unexpected difficulty or disappointment, will audibly express their feelings in some way that will afford a clew to the matter, and he had hoped that the mayor would do so. Some clew was needed if he was to understand this extraordinary business, and Spike intended to understand if he could.

An undue interest in the affairs of other people was not among Mr. Creach's many failings. Usually, like Satan, he attended strictly to his own business, but he felt that the present case might well prove to be of great interest to him, indirectly at least. People didn't leave so large an amount of money in such a place and in such a manner without good and sufficient reason. Women like Miss Herondene, save for reasons both imperative and without precedent, would not employ a burglar to abstract that money, paying an equal amount for the job.

No. There was crookedness somewhere, that much seemed plain. Now, whatever that crookedness might be, Miss Herondene certainly had not initiated it; Spike found himself smiling with grim amusement at the absurdity of the thought. Then it must be the mayor, who was trying to slip something over on Miss Herondene, or some one in whom Miss Herondene was vitally interested. Probably that nephew of hers, who was building the City Terminal.

That was the most tenable theory. Perhaps he could confirm it through Miss Herondene herself. He would try, anyway. Positive information that would give him a hold not only upon the mayor, but probably on many other officials besides, would be a most useful thing to Mr. Creach.

In the meantime, however, it behooved him to act with caution. Very disastrous would it be were he to be seen leaving the library with the money in his pocket; and he did not know who might be lurking on the other side of that door. So he waited, with professional patience, until the building and its immediate surroundings were deserted, except for the lazy watchman. Then, dropping out of a window onto the grass beneath, he walked quietly home to his lodgings.

There—for Mr. Creach took some pride in his personal appearance—he washed and changed his clothing, removing the dust he had acquired in his work. At his accustomed restaurant, he ate his evening meal, then caught a street car to the Herondene place.

The festivities had begun. Outside the grounds Spike could hear the strains of the orchestra. Doubtless the police were keeping a watch upon the place, but this troubled Spike not at all. He even wished that they might stop him, in order that he might have the fun of seeing their astonishment when he insisted upon their taking his name in to Miss Herondene.

The pleasure was denied Spike because the police, at the moment of his arrival, were in the act of stalking the individual who had appeared at the instance of Jimmy Wilson, thus causing the individual in question to break his tryst and greatly disquiet Jimmy, who was on the lookout for him, in order to admit him by way of the dining room window. Spike arrived at the side door to which he had been directed.

The door stood ajar and Spike entered. As he did so the door at his left also opened, revealing Miss Herondene herself, beaming hospitably. Aunt Sophronia could not refrain from being hospitable to any one who entered her house.

"Come right in," she invited. "I fear you'll have to wait for a little while. Did you get what you went after?"

By way of reply, Spike laid the five one thousand-dollar bills upon the table. Picking up a reading glass, Aunt Sophronia examined them. Then she nodded, and handed both the bills and the magnifying glass to Spike.

"A little later I'll ask you to tell exactly where and how you got these bills, and also to identify the bills themselves," said she. "The bills are marked, you see; marked by having a pair of spectacles drawn in ink on the faces of the engraved portraits.

Spike's eyes were excellent, and he had no need of the glass. He could see the identifying marks clearly enough. Nodding, he laid the bills once more upon the table.

"The man who marked those bills is Dunning, the district attorney," continued Aunt Sophronia. "I didn't invite him, and didn't expect him—but he's here. I shall call him in and accuse him in the presence of the two men—my nephew and Mr. Ayres—he is trying to injure. I'm sorry to have to do this in my own house, and at a time like this. But I must. There's no time to spare. Dunning didn't come here, uninvited, without some strong reason, and if I wait it may be too late. But don't you be afraid to answer any questions. District attorney or no district attorney, I'll see that he doesn't harm you."

"Right, ma'am," answered Spike, after an instant of hesitation.

"I'm responsible for what you've done, and I'll protect you," went on Aunt Sophronia, noting this hesitation. "It may take me some little time to find all the people I want, and to get 'em together in here, so you'll have to wait. Also you'll have to answer some questions. For this trouble, which wasn't in our bargain, I'll pay you extra."

Rising, she took the bills, folded them and tucked them into her bodice, then opened a table drawer and took from it a cigar box.

"I'm afraid there isn't any whiskey where I can get at it—" she began.

"There's never any whiskey for me, ma'am," Spike interrupted. "It's poor stuff for a man in my business."

"For any man in any business," agreed Aunt Sophronia. "Here are some cigars, though. My nephew bought 'em; they ought to be good. Take all you want. Now I've got to go."

She did go, and as the door closed behind her, Spike Creach pursed his lips in a noiseless whistle of amusement. Never, in a life of greatly varied incident, had he experienced anything like this.

Lighting one of the cigars, Spike tried it critically, his sense of amusement increasing with every puff. Here was he, Spike Creach, seated—by invitation, too—in a most luxurious library, with one of the best cigars he had ever smoked, waiting to "put one over" on his official arch-enemy, the district attorney. Could anything be more perfect? Spike laughed aloud.

"Gee!" he exclaimed. "I could die doin' a job like this!"

CHAPTER VII.

ALMOST WON.

NEVER, in her waking hours, was Aunt Sophronia's mind an idle one; but now, as she left her library, it was busier than usual. To begin with, she had to see that things were running smoothly at the dance; for to make sure that her guests were in no way neglected was with her an article of faith that ranked almost beside her religion. A hurried inspection told her that all was well, and left her to attend to more important affairs.

Previously, when she had noted the presence of Dunning, the district attorney, her first indignant impulse had been to go to him, remind him that he was uninvited and to inform him that his presence in her house was not desired. A second thought, however, restrained her. Her great fear was that he would attempt to accomplish his purpose before Spike Creach returned to report. Now that Spike had returned with his spoils, Aunt Sophronia felt herself armed and ready to act.

After some search she succeeded in rounding up Mr. Ayres and Phil and herd-

ing them into the library. When this was accomplished she sought Dunning, who was still standing in the inconspicuous spot where she first had seen him.

"You know, of course, that you have no right to be here," she said. "As you are here, however, I'll ask you to go into the library; I wish to speak with you."

Turning, she led the way. For a moment Dunning hesitated. Then, with bravado in his manner, but dismay in his heart, he followed her. There was good reason for this dismay of his.

Already Dunning and Horton had compared notes. Each had denied—and, of course, quite truly—having possession of the marked bills. Neither, however, believed the other, and each had accused the other of playing false.

Two brawny men from Police Headquarters had come with Dunning, and had been posted by him just outside within easy call. It was Horton's turn to act. Horton's part in the game was to call Phil Herondene aside, and in a carefully concocted speech, accuse him of having demanded and accepted graft from Lafayette Feelin. Phil, of course, would hotly deny this. Then Horton was to plunge his hand into the inner pocket of Phil's coat, and bring forth the marked bills which he had concealed in his hand from the first. This done, Dunning would call in his Central Office men—and the rest would be easy.

As it was, Horton refused to believe that Dunning ever had left those marked bills in the safe. Dunning believed that Horton had taken the bills, but was lying about it in order to avoid having to use them in the manner agreed upon. Each thought that now, when the final point was reached, the other was afraid to act.

The two had quarrelled until the beginning of a dance when the mayor was called away. The dance over, Horton was returning in order to renew the quarrel, when he saw his late antagonist meekly following Aunt Sophronia. Horton was as dismayed as Dunning. He also followed, but at a distance, feeling sure Dunning had betrayed him, and hoping to gain some information upon which he might base his defense when that defense should be needed. Victory was hovering over Aunt Sophronia's banners.

Aunt Sophronia's library was blue with smoke of excellent tobacco; and as Aunt Sophronia entered it, Mr. Ayres, her nephew and the burglar within her gates were discussing local politics with the utmost friendliness and apparent respect for each other's opinions. All rose when she entered; she motioned them to resume their seats. She waved Dunning also to a seat, but he sullenly elected to stand.

Turning back to the doorway through which she had entered the room, Aunt Sophronia looped back the portière that covered it, so that no one could approach it very closely without being seen. There was another doorway, but it opened only onto a back passage, where none of the guests would wander, and therefore the curtain which shielded it was left undisturbed.

As Aunt Sophronia seated herself at the table, for a moment she inwardly quailed before the masculine eyes, hostile or wondering, that were turned expectantly upon her. Rarely does it fall to the lot of an elderly maiden lady of excellent position and conventional surroundings to be placed in such a situation.

Naturally she found some difficulty in deciding just how to open the subject. She was not the sort, however, who would be daunted by difficulties. The best place to begin, she decided, was not necessarily at the beginning, but at the spot where the enemy least expects an attack. This sound plan she proceeded to put into practice. She turned suddenly upon the district attorney.

"Who is the Big Boss?" she demanded.

All the men were startled, but though the district attorney was the most startled of all, he also recovered himself the most quickly, and instinctively began to spar for time, lawyer like.

"It depends upon the sense in which you use that term," he replied. "In a political sense I suppose it could most properly be applied to the President of the United States."

Aunt Sophronia was baffled, but not defeated.

"What has the President of the United

States got to do with our Terminal? With the building, and the tracks and the culverts and wharves?" she pursued, doggedly.

"Why, as head of the Federal Government, the President has a great deal to do with these things," responded Dunning, easily. "Our Terminal is not a strictly local affair, as so many people seem to think, except in so far as the building itself is concerned. Federal appropriations contribute a portion of the funds. In such funds Washington naturally has a direct interest."

This information was as far as possible from what she wanted to learn. Therefore, she abruptly shifted her ground.

"You know, as we all know," she cried, "that the Terminal is full of bad work—scamped work. You know, as we all know, that the scamped work was permitted because somebody was paid to allow it."

Here again Aunt Sophronia paused impressively, while her spectacles were fixed with a glare of baleful meaning upon the district attorney. To the credit of Dunning's power of dissimulation it is to be recorded that with the courage of desperation he managed to achieve a smile that was intended to express perfect confidence in himself and his mastery of the situation.

Horton, standing outside the library door, but as near it as he dared approach, and hugging the near wall in order to avoid being seen from within, cursed bitterly, but softly. How much did this old woman know? And how had she learned it?

"You know who paid the graft," began Aunt Sophronia, slowly and deliberately, her accusing glare fixed upon Dunning. "You know who received—"

"Yes," Dunning sneered as he interrupted her. "I do know the man who received the graft. That's why I'm here—uninvited, as you took some pains to remind me. I came in my official capacity. I came in order to—"

"You came in order to 'frame' my nephew," said Aunt Sophronia with deadly earnestness, interrupting. "You and the 'Big Boss' were to have worked together in that. It was you who got the graft money from the contractor, but he wouldn't trust you to use that money. So you had to leave it locked in a safe, where the 'Big Boss' was to go and get it. He failed to get it because I got it first. Here it is—five bills, with a pair of spectacles drawn on the portrait engraved on each bill."

Taking the bills from her bodice, Aunt Sophronia laid them on the table as she spoke. For a little there was silence, broken by the dance music that had the lilt of mocking laughter. Dunning's face turned pale, while his mind whirled with a despairing rapidity that perhaps it never before had equalled.

Never for an instant had the district attorney contemplated the remotest possibility of his plans becoming thus known. Try as he might he could conceive of only two ways in which they could have become known.

Horton, the mayor, had it in his power to betray the plans—but Horton wouldn't. He would have everything to lose and nothing to gain by such a course. But Feelin—nobody could tell what a boneheaded rough-neck like Feelin might do. It might be that he, rather than risk his five thousand dollars, had merely pretended to place them in the safe, and then had gone and sold his two erstwhile confederates to Miss Herondene. This being so, all was not lost, as he had feared. Not by any means! What would Feelin's unsupported word weigh against the combined testimony of the mayor and district attorney? Nothing!

So Dunning heaved a sigh of relief. He crossed his legs jauntily as he leaned against the wall. He even managed once more to summon a sneering smile as he gazed at Aunt Sophronia.

"Miss Herondene," he measured his words in rhetorical cadence, "do you mean seriously to assert that you really believe what you've just said?"

Aunt Sophronia did not reply. Her expression made it plain that she considered no reply necessary. She sat looking at Dunning with such contempt that at first he shifted uneasily, and then, because he was frightened, he also became angry. Anything was better than that ominous silence, laced with derisive music. Desperately, he went on:

"And can you—you, a devoted churchwoman—reconcile it to your conscience to try and fasten a crime upon innocent men in order to protect your guilty nephew?" he asked.

Phil Herondene sprang to his feet. Mr. Ayres pulled him back into his seat.

"Let her alone!" commanded the older man. "She's running this show, my boy. And she's doing it a lot better than we could."

"You're not very dangerous, taken by yourself." Aunt Sophronia ignored the interruption. "You've no heart at all, no scruples and no brains worth mentioning; just cunning. You're trusted only with the dirty work of the man above you—of the 'Big Boss,' as you called him. He, not you, is the one I want to reach. So I'm goin' to give you a chance. You can resign your office, giving whatever lyin' reasons you choose. You can tell the full story of who this 'Big Boss' is, and what he has done. If you do these things, I'll make no move to prosecute you. I'll let you go."

With all the cunning at his command, Dunning sought for a way out of his difficulty, but he saw no path but that offered by Aunt Sophronia. With a despairing gulp he had decided to take that path when, with a grin of boyish malice, Spike Creach, the burglar, rose from his chair.

"If Dunning won't tell you, Miss Herondene, I will," said he. "I seen the Big Boss. He came to get them bills, just after I had swiped 'em out of the safe. He's the biggest boss in this town, anyhow. He's the—"

Suddenly the lights vanished; black darkness sprang from all corners to flood the room, and from behind the farther doorway—the doorway leading into the back passage—the darkness was pierced by a streak of rusty flame. The shot, in that confined space, was like the report of a field piece. A groan, and the thud of a falling body, followed it.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

THE BOLD PLAYBOY

SURE I'm thinkin' I'll be lookin' for the Irish leprechaun,
Who sits beside the crossroads cobbling shoon,
For if you're very lucky you can see him ere the dawn,
With his pot o' gold a shinin' by the moon.

There he mends the faery slippers that the little people wear,
But he keeps one thrifty eye upon his gold.
Now, if you could distract him from his treasure, an' you dare,
You can have the glitterin' riches so I'm told.

Whisper! Darlin', I'll bewitch him with a song that cannot fail,
The while I steal his pot o' gold away;
Then I'll take it to the man that has young maiden's dreams for sale,
And I'll buy you twenty thousand in one day.

There'll be dreams of woven raiment, silken soft as colleen's sighs,
And star fire jewels to wind in your dark braid;
And a garden filled with roses under moonlit, amorous skies,
Where I, machree, shall kiss you unafraid.

Frances R. Durham.

Fool's Gold

By J. ALLAN DUNN

A NOVELETTE—COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

THE automobile painfully climbed the ridge with its wheels deep in the soft road that was little better than a wide trail. Then it abruptly stopped on the exact crest of the desert range as if, having attained its objective, it had halted in exhaustion.

The car and its two occupants were alike coated with alkaline dust. The radiator boiled viciously.

To either side were sparse catclaw, greasewood and cactus, with heavier growth at the bottom of the gulch on the left hand. On the right the range fell away in sharp slopes to the desert three thousand feet below, slanting cliffs alternating with vertical precipices.

Beyond the desert was another range, vague of outline; shifty of color, like an opal. The sheer loneliness and vast silence were heightened by the intermittent whir of cicadas.

The driver stepped out of the car; dust, fine as talcum powder, sifting from him as he moved. His companion, licking at caked lips distastefully and twisting his thin body in nervous hitches, demanded:

"Whassa matter with 'er?"

"Gas tank's empty. Need water, too. 'Bout as much chance of gettin' one as the other in this dump." The speaker looked out over Death Valley with a sneer, lit a cigarette and inhaled its smoke deeply, rapidly.

"Why 'n hell didn' you stop an' fill up, like I told you?" the other persisted, breaking into a volley of curses.

His companion surveyed him with a smoldering resentment in his pale blue eyes. Both were nervous types, addicts of drugs, but the driver was the better man of the two. He held himself under control while his companion twitched, rubbed his nose and shivered as if he were cold.

Both were pasty of face, shifty of glance, slight of frame and narrow of shoulder, bad lots, numb or devoid of moral consciousness. They were as useful to the com-

munity at large as a pair of weasels to a poultryman.

Because " Gyp " Galt was the cooler, he had been chosen to drive the car. " Lefty " Sands had been picked for " lookout," while the two other members of the gang had gone inside to loot, and, if it seemed necessary, or if they felt like it, to kill. Neither of this latter pair had any further use for names, although the police furnished them to the reporters after the bodies had been taken to the morgue.

" Lissen," said Gyp coldly, throwing away the fag of his cigarette. " These banks is gettin' foxy. There was an extra harness-bull on the beat to size up every car parked on the block. Then you come ballyhooin' across the street an' we go off like we was a parade."

" I had to tell you they'd been bumped off, didn' I, so's you'd make a get-away?"

" You didn't have to kiyi like a dorg with a can tied to it."

" Yah! You'd have yelped if you'd seen what I did. There was a coop up in that balcony, bullet-proof glass, I guess, an' there was two dicks hidin' in it. They fires through slots wit' riot guns. Shot the face off'n Bill an' the belly out of Slim. All done in a second. Say, it made me sick to the stomach."

" You don't have to tell me that. But I'll tell you why I didn't stop for gas or water. There ain't a garage between here an' Los Angeles County that ain't got wit' a radio-receivin' outfit. Headquarters has sent out everything about us from my hat down to the spare tire. We changed our number plates, an' was lucky to get by."

" Aw, we c'u'd have held a garage up. Plugged 'em."

" You can't shoot up the whole county. And if they ever get us they'll railroad us, Lefty. You're lucky you're here."

" Lucky, am I? Then I'd hate like hell to be out of luck. What 'll we do with the car? An' what about this dump you're makin' for? What if they've got a radio outfit?"

" We got to take a chance. They're all hicks up here in Crystal—miners. We'll ditch the car so they won't think we're millyunaires."

" Millyunaires! I got two berries to my name."

" I've got about sixty cents. Kitty's holdin' my roll—what was left of it."

" Edna's got mine. Say, where'll those two dames be by now?"

" Well, d'ye blame 'em? Want 'em to stick around an' get the quiz?"

" Thasso! How'd you come to know so much about this Crystal dump, Gyp?"

They were standing beside the dead car now in the twilight that still lingered. There was not even a whirl of dust as evidence of distant travel on desert or mountain road.

Gyp Galt grinned and lit another cigarette.

" My old man was a miner. My old woman kep' a hash-house in Crystal when the place was good twelve years ago. I hung around till I got sick of the dump.

" The old man was a nut. Always goin' to strike it rich. He did once. Come in wit' chunks of stuff that was lousy wit' gold.

" Say, that rock was worth a hundred an' fifty bucks a pound. An' there was plenty of it. On'y the old fool c'u'dn't ever find it again. Whaddya know about that? C'u'dn't find it!

" Me an' the old woman made our getaway while he was off with his burros. She finally croaks wit' influenza."

" Suppose he'd found the stuff again?"

" Suppose nothin', Lefty! The desert's full of rats—that's what they call 'em—desert rats—all goin' to find a lost mine or the mother lode. Yah! He c'u'dn't find nothin'. If he had, we'd have heard about it an' the old woman w'd have been on his neck."

" Think he's up there—to Crystal?"

" I sh'u'd worry. He won't know me, and I ain't lettin' on my name's Galt. Unless he's got a stake. Then I might make a quick touch for us to use the railroad."

" That's across the desert, ain't it?"

" Yep. Come on, let's dump the car."

The shadows had flooded the desert now. Only on the peaks and the ridge where the car stood with the two gunmen the garish colors still flamed.

They turned the car away from the road, released the brake and started it down the

cliffs. It ran swiftly and smoothly at first, then began to bound as the tires hit protruding rocks.

One burst, the car slued, struck a low bowlder and leaped into the air. It landed askew, turned a somersault over a fifty foot cliff, and, sliding and rolling in a cloud of dust, battered and smashed, it crashed down to the desert. A miniature avalanche of earth and rocks pounded after it.

The two gangsters watched without emotion. The car had served their temporary purpose. There was no place to hide it. Galt had stolen it and he had no pride in its possession.

"How far to Crystal?" asked Lefty.

"Search me. It don't count how far it is. We got to make it."

II.

THEY started off northward. The last sun ray faded and the stars leaped out like steely points. The desert floor was only a gulf of mystery. The air grew chilly.

"Got any Mary Ann, Gyp?" Lefty whined shiveringly, using the gangster slang for the Mexican *marinua*, a variety of ragweed. Taken mixed with tobacco, the drug imparts a mad strength together with a will for evil. The user for the time forgets thirst and hunger and fatigue. And it leaves him a little less of a man than he may have been before.

"Nothin' doin'." The answer was evasion. Gyp had the stuff, but the quantity was limited, and it might be needed later. He could fight the craving, so could his companion.

Lefty asked presently: "What made you pick this dump, Gyp? Know any one who'll fix us for a hideout? I'm hungry as a dog. And, say, I'd give my right eye for a shot of hooch."

"I headed here because it was the best place I c'u'd think of. Do you know a better?" Gyp's tone was purposely truculent. He used this attitude as a lash to Lefty, who didn't amount to much when drugs or strong drink were out of his system.

"Told you I left Crystal when I was a kid. Won't any one recognize me.

"We may have to stay till we can make a stake. We'll eat all right. Maybe I'll strike the old man. Maybe not. He's a nut on a lot of things.

"We'll give the dump the once over before we go in. We got to try an' git rid of these clothes. If we can't we'd better look for a hideout. Lots of old cabins no one's usin'."

Gyp Galt seemed to absorb vigor from his return to the scenes of his childhood where he had been the mascot of the camp until he turned vicious. He strode along, head up.

Lefty Sands was gradually getting the horrors. Town born, and alley reared, the loneliness of the ridge trail was awful.

A cold wind came up from the great, silent space he knew as Death Valley, and grim tales of fact and fiction recurred to him as he trudged along. He huddled close to Gyp for protection.

His feet were burning, for all the chill of the night, cramped in fancy shoes. His flesh was goose-pricked from the low temperature, his thin blood and enfeebled heart. The mystery of the mountains pressed in upon him with a weird menace. Aw, to be back in Los Angeles! Say down at the Chink's with a stomach full of *chow mein*, and Edna twirling *yen hok* on a needle, heating the stuff as it gave off its poisonous fumes to become the essence of dreams.

There he could forget what he had seen through the windows of the bank. Bill and Slim weltering in their blood! It had made him sick then; it did now, mentally and physically.

Bill and Slim had been his leaders. They planned the turns, they faced the risks. Bill had bumped off a harness-bull in a running fight against odds.

To Lefty's warped mind, they were heroes, nimble of wit and agile of body, swaggering gamblers and fascinators of women. They loomed as large in his distorted reasoning as Dick Turpin to a common pickpocket.

Lefty knew his limitations. It was only on the wave of stimulating drugs that he could comport himself as became a member of the gang.

And he had shared the rewards. The privilege of saloon back rooms, the glances

of the girls, the envy of other men, the whisper that included him as a gangster. Smart togs, good eats. Edna!

He knew that she had taken up with him only temporarily. Not being able to snare Bill or Slim, and Gyp being steady with his Kit, Edna had tolerated Lefty for the glamour of being attached to the gang; to have an escort on whom other men looked fearfully; for the money he showered on her when they made a turn; for the excitement.

She had told him all this at times when they lay low, when the dicks were out and active; periods of low funds and depression. Sometimes she had been kind to him. Now she had cleared out.

Gyp did not blame the girls for doing this. Lefty had no such chivalry.

He was beginning to feel like a rat in a cistern with all this vast emptiness about him. What frightful spaces to the stars!

The dim forms of cactus looked as if they must harbor the clawed and fanged beasts of the wilds. The cliffs pitched down to a void that had no water, no grass, no trees—Death Valley!

What fools they were to come this way. If he'd been running the car instead of Gyp. Down south to the border, Tia Juana way?

But he remembered Gyp's driving top speed through perilous places; the skidding turns when they had shaken off the pursuing cars and lost them in the traffic that Gyp had shuttled through with uncanny skill. Lefty could never have done that. Gyp might have been a racing driver now if he hadn't been ruled off for crookedness.

Gyp was whistling between his teeth snatches of jazz. Lefty snarled at him:

"Can the music. Have we got to walk all night?"

"What's eatin' you?"

Lefty wilted. He had a gun in his pocket—an automatic. Gyp had two, one on his hip and one in a shoulder holster.

More likely if he made a move Gyp would punch him. Gyp had drawn down winner's money in ring preliminaries more than once—that was how he got his nose flattened.

There was no sense in quarreling with Gyp. What would he do without him in this hole of a place?

"I was just askin' you how much farther it was? You don't have to git sore."

"I don't know. Told you that before. It ain't fur."

On they walked again. Lefty began to scratch the back of his hand. The tip of his nose itched. And they had come away without a deck of dope, without anything but small change and a few cigarettes. He had only two smokes left.

Bill and Slim had said the bank was a cinch. There would be the fever of the get-away, the hide-out at the Chink's! The girls and the *yen hok*. And now—oh, it was plain hell!

They topped a rise and Gyp pointed out some scattered lights.

"There you are," he said. "You got a cigarette? I got extry papers, an' some Mary Ann. We'll have a whiff."

"You got Mary Ann? Why didn't you—"

"Aw, shut up. We got a turn to do. You need primin'."

Lefty nervously pricked open a cigarette with his scarf pin and spilled the tobacco into the palm of his hand. Gyp produced the dried leaves and they rolled two cigarettes from the mixture. Then they lighted up, inhaling the pernicious fumes and waiting for the drug to take effect.

III.

Suddenly Gyp clamped his hand on Lefty's arm.

"Git down, low!" he whispered. "Car coming."

They heard the palpitation of a two-cylinder making the grade. Searchlights showed, grew brighter as they cowered. A small car went tinnily by, its red eye diminishing toward Crystal.

"Think that's the mail, Gyp?"

"What if it is? Too close behind us to bring the news. We beat the trains."

Lefty thought of the radio broadcasting, a ghostly voice eliminating space, telling the tale of their crime to all good citizens, setting on the official huntsmen. But the insidious drug was giving him a spurious bravery, inspiring the desire to show that he was a gangster.

He arose promptly when Gyp gave the word, took out his gun and slid back the breech to see if there was a cartridge handy.

"Can the gat," said Gyp, scornfully. "Come on."

The scattering cabins of the mining camp showed like splotches on the foothills. Here and there windows glowed.

There was a wabbly attempt at a street. It was deserted. At the far end lights illuminated a building with a false high front.

"That used to be Dan's place," said Gyp. "The old woman's shack was further down the hill. Wouldn't wonder if Dan was still runnin' it. He must be eighty. All dried up an' looks like a horn-toad. We can eat there an' git a drink too, I reckon."

He spoke with a certain assurance, surveying the town, getting his bearings, soaking in confidence like a sponge thrown into water. He led the way back of the low buildings and stopped where empty barrels and cases were piled beside a door.

"Store," he said. "Everything here from dynamite to dried apples, Lefty. We'll drift in through the winder."

Gyp mounted a box, slipped the long blade of his knife between sashes, found the simple catch and set it back. Thieves in Crystal were unexpected.

The layout of the store was simple, piled-up tables, the counter, canned goods on shelves, a cigar case. Gyp groped among the tables, with carefully cupped matches in his palms while he read the sizes on the rough clothing. He was particular to leave the piles in order and he would not permit Lefty to loot the cash register.

"Likely as not there's nothin' in it," he said. "We don't want 'em to miss anything. They'd sure suspect strangers."

There was a spring lock to the back door and they went out with their arms filled. Gyp led uphill to an old shack that promised to be vacant. Here they lit a candle after hanging sacking across the only window.

There were bunks in the corners and odds and ends of a bachelor miner's outfit all about. These included a rusty stove, but Gyp would not risk using it.

The spur of the *marinua*, with his return to old haunts, had given him alertness and precision that made Lefty fall into admiring line. Gyp's jaw was set and there was a foxy, cruel look in his eyes where the pupils had contracted to the size of seed pearls; he forgot nothing, lost no time.

They changed to the rough clothes from the store and buried their city wear in the dirt floor, stamping down the earth afterward. When fully clad Gyp put them both through inspection.

The shirts and the outer clothes now were tousled and pulled by both men; the shoes scuffed, grease spots made from candles and dust. Then Gyp set Lefty an example by rolling in the dirt and slapping off the superfluous soil. They had quenched their thirst with soda pop at the store, but Gyp saved a bottle for the mud with which he anointed shoes and sleeves and legs.

"We'll get by," he announced finally. "But keep your cap on all the time. Our hair's too short, see. City cut. We ain't burned enough. Smudge up your face a bit.

"An' lissen. It's damn easy to say too much. Less we talk the better.

"We don't want to be thought tenderfeet, savvy, but as guys that haven't been out for a bit, yet know the ropes. I do know 'em, enough to pass."

Lefty, emulous of Gyp's resourcefulness, protested: "What d'ye take me for? A sucker? I won't chatter."

Gyp whirled on him with chilly ferocity in his narrowed eyes.

"You said it. A sucker!" he gritted. "An' you're not goin' to make one out of me. I can fit in here for a bit. You can if you keep your trap closed. I'm the wise guy an' you're the dummy. Git me?"

He thrust out his jaw. His face was a mask of malevolence. In him was neither fear nor hate, only a fixed purpose to get into the clear.

His brain was dominated by *marinua*. Reason was there, but scant emotion. His senses were alert, but his atrophied soul was temporarily dead.

Lefty subsided. With him the *marinua* had to work on a duller brain, coarser fibers, a weaker body and less accurate nervous system.

The two killers fed on canned goods,

cached the remainder of the supplies and sallied forth. Paired, they were as dangerous in the mining camp as prowling tigers in a sleeping village.

Destitute of moral consciousness, they were primed to slay as readily as an average man might offer a handshake. Lefty, however, was subservient to Gyp.

Dan's Place was unchanged. And the old-timer's warped body was active and his eyes bright in his leathery face as he presided over the big room. His glance lit on the two strangers as they came in, but it held no recognition. Gyp's flattened nose and the change from youth to maturity had disguised him effectually.

The bar was open for old-time usage. As Gyp had surmised, Crystal did not bother about the prohibition law. The citizens apparently were unanimous in the belief that their constitutional rights had been invaded by the Eighteenth Amendment. Most of them were old-timers who assumed that rules applicable to more settled communities were not intended for mining camps.

The same idea permitted gambling. Within the last three months old tables, stored away by Dan when the luck passed from Crystal, had been refurbished and set up, and the chips had been laundered by Fang, the aged Chinese laundryman.

Faro was going, a roulette wheel spun; there were two tables of stud and one of straight draw poker. The room was wreathed in smoke, with the outbreathing of nearly forty men. They gave slight notice to the entrance of Gyp and Lefty, who went to the bar and ordered whisky.

The liquor took only one of Lefty's dollars. Therefore, they repeated and asked the bartender, a grizzled man with one eye, to have one with them. Gyp did the talking. The bartender accepted. This left them with ten cents, but they had a third drink on the house.

The alcohol blended with the effect of the *marinua* and set them on a plane of their own. They were not drunk, but they walked more lightly; they were surcharged with a vicious energy.

Lefty lit a cigarette. His eyes roved over the room.

"Say," he whispered to Gyp. "How about it? This is a setup. Look at the coin in sight. We c'ud stick 'em up easy."

He spoke out of the corner of his mouth, noiselessly, an accomplishment of the underworld.

Gyp answered him in the same manner, but there was a deadly threat in it.

"An' then what? Where's your getaway? You play dummy or I'll make you one for keeps."

IV.

Gyp and Lefty went out on the front steps and lounged against a rail, gazing into the room, smoking their cigarettes.

They had blankets back at the deserted shack and expected to pass the night there; food enough for a day, and tobacco. Money they had to have, first of all for liquor, and then for the final getaway.

Over this problem Gyp bent his energies. Lefty brooded after his partner's rebuff.

Gyp was pretty certain that there was a motor stage crossing Death Valley between Crystal and the Borax mines, connecting with the railroad. Fare money would get them out of the State.

Los Angeles would not be healthy for them. Something of the olden Vigilante spirit was being aroused in the citizens, and police efforts to stamp out crime were quadrupled. If they caught Gyp and Lefty they would beat them to a pulp before they got into court. Once before the judge the law would make an example of them. San Francisco would be no safer.

He had Chicago in mind. And he did not like to bum his way. He wanted a fast train to carry them into the warren of Chicago's underworld. All this took money.

If he got enough for Lefty—already Gyp referred to him in his own mind as the "dummy"—well and good. If not, he wouldn't delay his own getaway.

But to leave Lefty behind would set the lawhounds on the direct trail. Therefore, the dummy must be eliminated.

In his drugged state, Gyp thought no more of "bumping off" Lefty than he would have hesitated over killing a stray cat. He could get him away from the camp to a place where only coyotes and buzzards would ever find him.

His mind ran like a clock, going over the chances. Then he projected his father from the subconscious niche in his brain. Galt, the old-timer. George Galt, desert-rat. Big, generous, stern, with ideas about morals and religion that had made Gyp classify him a nut and had caused Gyp's mother—a flighty bit of flotsam femininity with a secret past—to fear and despise and cheat him.

Old Galt might have money. He might be cajoled into giving it up. If he had none, he could borrow it. Dan, the owner of the gaming house, would always stake him. It was good luck Dan was still alive.

The Old Man might be dead. Gyp dared not make inquiries. He was sure no one had recognized him, but they might if they were given any tip like that.

The father had been proud of the name of Galt. Gyp, however, had been bored by their record; how they had marched with Putnam and adventured with Boone and fought with Grant. To save his own flesh and blood from the penitentiary, old Galt would no doubt give good money.

He was the best bet, if alive and accessible. He might be off on one of his eternal pilgrimages after that lost ledge of his, with his burros and his old outfit, searching and tapping and pecking among the cliffs of Purgatory, Funeral and Amargosa Ranges, not to return until his grub was gone.

They would have to find out about that somehow, Gyp reflected. And, if that bet could not be cashed in, Lefty's general idea of a holdup was all right, but it needed refining.

To pick the gambling winner of the evening, to follow him to a lonely cabin!

Gyp had quite a little *marinua*. He would need it. Normally his mind did not correctly click off like this. He gave full credit to the drug.

He had used it when he went into the prize-ring. It invested him with a ruthlessness that broke down all ordinary barriers and helped to offset whatever superior skill his antagonist might have. Gyp had fancied more than once that the *marinua* so altered his nervous control that a smash to his jaw did not affect him as ordinarily it might.

There were drawbacks. He had never analyzed the effects; never told himself that the drug shut his soul up in a dark closet and made him sheer brute. But he did know that it endowed him with a temper that was not so much irritable as designedly offensive.

He had nearly killed Kitty while he was under the influence, once at laughter of hers that had offended him; another time because the match she proffered for his cigarette had gone out prematurely, and again merely because he had desired to see her squirm and writhe and beg him for mercy.

That last time Kitty had been inhaling *marinua*, too, and she had fought him back with a savage ferocity and a litheness that almost matched him, they struggling silently, with deadly intent, until some one had come in accidentally and separated them.

So, Kitty—

Suddenly Gyp stiffened. Lefty, too, half stood, half crouched in tense attention. Some one inside Dan's Place had mentioned a name vastly important to them.

"Hear about Galt?"

"No. What?"

"The old boy's hit it. Found the ledge he struck way back an' bin lookin' for twenty year or more, I reckon."

"Rich?"

"Rotten with it. Come in jest afore sundown. Had a small sack of it. C'u'd have brought in twenty thousan' dollars worth, on'y one of his burros give out on him an' t'other was nigh tuckered. Bet he's had them burros thirty year."

"I've known 'em twenty myself. Thinks more of 'em than he does hisself."

"Yep. W'u'dn't load the last one up with gold becos it might give him a pack sore. Burro come in bare as the back of yore hand. Galt was totin' everything. Left a lot of stuff behind. He's comin' up later on."

Lefty trod on Gyp's foot lightly and Gyp grasped him by the wrist, restraining him. Here was luck. The breaks were with them.

"No chance of him lettin' on where it is?"

"Reckon not. It's jest a ledge. Grass

root proposition. Float. Quick clean-up for one man. The old-timer's no hawg. He'd let the whole camp in if there was a real strike. He told me there was twenty thousan' in sight."

"Time he struck it. Will he hit the high spots?"

"Nope. He don't drink an' he don't gamble. He might give it to some church. He'll keep right on prospectin', I reckon."

"That wife of his w'u'd have helped him spend it."

"That trollop! He was lucky to git rid of her."

V.

Lefty felt Gyp's grip melt away. He turned and saw Gyp's eyes shining like a beast that scents the kill. His right hand glided up to his left coat lapel, disappeared, swift as the strike of a snake. The gangster's face was devilish.

This time Lefty saw the danger of the threatened move. To stick up a crowd for money with a clean getaway was one thing. But a killing—now.

The *marinua* gave him the nerve to close with Gyp and wrap his arms about him in a tight clinch, head on Gyp's shoulder, talking right into his ear.

"You're makin' the sucker play now. Quit."

"You heard what he called my mother? I'll make a sieve of his dirty hide. Let me go, you—"

Both spoke without more than a hint of sound even in the stress of the moment. But Lefty clung while Gyp tugged to release his shoulder gun.

"Aw, you said yourself we c'u'dnt make a getaway. Quit it."

"What do I care, long as I get him, the—"

Then the two talkative miners moved out of immediate range, and there came a general shifting of eyes toward a rear door where some one was entering who evidently commanded much interest.

Gyp, with a low snarl, reluctantly let his hand drop to his side. He could not see for the moment who was coming in.

There were greetings from Dan, the bartender, the lookouts. The faro dealer and case-keeper suspended their functions. Bets remained unplaced, uncashed. Cards were laid down.

"Hey there, old-timer! Struck it at last, did ye? Good luck to ye, Galt."

That was Dan speaking, working through the crowd to grip the old prospector's hand while others crowded round.

Lefty gazed with sagging jaw at this Galt who appeared so popular. Gyp's father?

The two were as different as tree from shrub, lion from jackal. Lefty had no such similes, but he marveled that such a man should have produced such a son.

Galt's shoulders were unbowed, although one was slightly higher than the other. But their level was far above that of Gyp's head and their breadth would have made twice his shoulders. As a lightweight Gyp was not without symmetry and a suggestion of strength, but he was a dwarf to this giant.

The face of the older Galt was seamed like granite and dark as a chestnut hull. The high bridged nose stood out like a promontory, the great jaw was a cape that the gray beard could not disguise.

The white hair graced the head with leonine vitality. The brows held nobility; the gray eyes with their network of sun-gazing wrinkles at the corners were frank, clear, bright.

The corded neck, berry brown, sank into the V of his blue shirt under which the barrel of a mighty chest showed plainly. There were thews and muscles to answer and fulfil the purpose that long years of endeavor had stamped upon the miner's countenance. The deep voice fitted the man as he stood there, half a head higher than the tallest of them.

"That ain't your old man?" whispered Lefty incredulously.

"That's him. Shut up."

"Well, you don't favor him much."

"Shut up!"

"Not struck it at last, Dan," said Galt, "but found it agen. Jest as I allus said I would. Sorry there ain't more of it, boys, to let you all in. But this ain't even a true outcrop. A weathered capledge brought down ages ago on the glaciers, I reckon.

"I can bring in all of it in a couple of trips when Jinny gits rested up an' I git me

another burro. I lost Pete an' nigh lost Jinny.

"Dan, set 'em up for all hands, free an' hearty. Spill yer licker, Dan; an' I'm derned if I don't take my shot along with the rest."

There were roars and guffaws of approval.

"Thet goes, old-timer," Dan announced. "On'y it's on the house. First drink you've had for years. But Dan's Place allus wetted a strike an' allus will."

The men lined up, deserting the tables to shake Galt by the hand, to examine the specimens in his poke. Lefty started to enter, but Gyp in turn held him back, whispering:

"Don't spill this. We'll play it safe."

There was a curious note in his face that made Lefty obey without a murmur, although his mouth watered for the free liquor. Gyp's eyes were glowing and he was licking his lips lightly while his fingers twitched.

"First drink you've had in years, old-timer," said Dan. "Drink hearty. Here's to yore luck."

"*Our* luck, Dan!" Galt's bass dominated all other talk, held a quality that made others listen. "Reckon you must have forgot yore interest in this mine. Reckon you've sort of overlooked grubstakin' me the last half dozen trips. You allus said you wanted to git back nigh to Los Angeles an' start a squab farm. Now you kin do it an', dern me, if I don't go in with ye."

The crowd whooped. Dan protested.

"You go to blazes!" he cried. "I didn't grubstake you, Galt. You call a miserable loan between friends a grubstake? You go plumb to blazes with yore mine an' yore squab farm. Crystal's started up agen. First the strike over to Poor Johnny's Tunnel an' now you. Old times comin' back.

"Why, you feeble-minded, designin', gray-headed old galoot, how about the time you paid my grocery bill after the camp went flat? How about the time you hoofed it twenty mile an' back to git me a doctor when I bruk my leg? Fill up, boys, an' drink hearty agen. Galt, you take another slug. You're plumb ravin'."

A late comer joined the lineup at the bar and took his drink. He was a man about thirty, tanned and shrewd looking.

"Hear the news, boys?" he asked. "'Nother bank robbery down to Los Angeles. They got two of 'em this time. Shot the daylights out of 'em with scatter-guns. Two got away in a car. I got the news down to Two Spring Ranch. The kid there has got a radio set. Police are broadcastin' all over. Five hundred reward."

On the landing the two gunmen shrank into a deep shadow, crouched, listening.

"Got the girls of the two chaps that got away. Seems one of the robbers is named Galt. Reckon it ain't any relative of yours?" He turned to the huge miner deprecatingly. "Chap about five foot-six with a broken nose. Used to be a bit of a fighter. Other one's shorter. Got away in a car that this Galt stole. He used to be a track driver, too. The police have got an idea they headed for the Nevada line."

Old George Galt looked intently at the informant.

"This is Taylor. Drives the stage, old-timer," Dan informed him. "They put it on again for the mails last week."

"Hm! The name ain't so usual, but I'll tell you this, stranger, it ain't flesh an' blood of mine mixed up in this. If it was I'd hunt him down if it took a year an' I'd hand him over to the hangman, glad of the chance. Cowardly coyotes, doped up with drugs an' shootin' down unarmed citizens in cold blood. If 'twas the old days we'd have formed the Vigilantes, strung 'em up an' left 'em swingin' as a warnin'."

The unaccustomed drinks had warmed up the old miner and his deep voice boomed as his eyes flashed and his fist pounded on the bar. He tapped the wooden butt of the six gun that was holstered at his right hip.

"Thar's the medicine for that kind of chuckawallas," he said. "Tincture of lead. But no flesh an' blood of mine, sir, robbed that bank."

The stage driver felt as if he had stirred up trouble. Others were looking at him angrily. He was a newcomer to the community and a man who wanted to be liked.

"No offense," he said. "Like as not the chap has no right to the name. It was just news."

Old Galt drew himself up and refused another drink. He held his head very erect as if his pride had been challenged.

"You git me on the trail of them miscreants," he said, "an' I'll help you run 'em down. Good-night to all of ye."

He made a dignified and rather dramatic exit.

"I didn't aim to rile him none," the stage driver declared.

"Wal, you did," said Dan laconically. "Galt's a mite techy about his good name."

Gyp watched the big figure of the miner slowly going down hill, while inside the bartender was talking.

"You say this Galt chap was broken-nosed?"

"Yes."

"There was two chaps in here to-night. Bought a couple rounds an' asked me in. They were dressed like they'd bin prospectin' round, but one of 'em had a flat nose, an' their hands was all soft, with their nails trimmed. Fingers stained up with cigarettes. Faces sort of peaky. No tan.

"I'll bet you they come from the city. Bet you that's the pair. Didn't Galt have a kid, once, Dan?"

"You've got that five hundred on the brain, Tim," said Dan, while the two gangsters squatted motionless, straining to catch every word. "Ain't no car 'cept Taylor's in camp. Nor no flyin' machine," he added sarcastically.

"What time this thing come off, Taylor?"

VI.

Gyp stayed to listen no longer. With Lefty he followed in the path taken by Galt.

"We got to git out," whispered Lefty. "They'll hold us on that nose of yourn, Gyp."

"I'll slice yours off if you don't quit talkin' like a fool. We're gettin' out. An' I'm gettin' even. Go soft."

They went on the tips of their toes in little rushes and were nearly up with the old miner when he stopped before a shack quite far down hill.

George Galt whistled, and Gyp dragged Lefty back of a bowlder. There the two squatted like a pair of unwholesome toads as a burro hobbled out of the darkness and thrust its soft nose in the miner's horny palm.

"Git a good rest, Jinny?" he said. "Finished yore grub, have ye? Got plenty of water? Good water, eh, Jinny? Drink hearty! If Pete c'u'd have had some of that water he w'u'dn't have cashed in out thar.

"I've been drinkin' myself, Jinny," he went on in the whimsical garrulity of the desert wanderer to a four-footed helper. "Whisky. Ain't done that sence the old woman slid out with 'Keno' Horton. She'd never have done that if she'd believed in our mine, Jinny.

"I'm sort of bothered, Jinny. There's a chap named Galt been tryin' bank robbery down to Los Angeles. Mixed up with a murder gang. I was wonderin' if it might have been Dick. He might have broke his nose or had it broke for him. I allus suspicioned he'd come to no good end. But I didn't let 'em see what I thought. I told 'em no Galt was that kind. An' I come away.

"Hold up them floppy ears of yourn. Tryin' to brush my eyes out? One more trip, ol' gal—two at the most—an' you're due for pasture, with oats on the side. There'll be a fine brook flowin' all day an' all night, so you'll forget the thirst out in the desert. Whoa—"

But Jinny had not yet appeased her long-cheated appetite for fodder. She backed off and for a tense moment angled her long ears at the rock where the two gangsters hid, and then she ambled off to her delayed supper.

Galt opened the door of his shack, went in and closed it. A light showed in the window.

Gyp said nothing as he rolled two cigarettes with *marinua* and passed one to Lefty. In the last few hours Lefty's respect for Gyp had enormously increased, and now he waited respectfully for his superior to speak.

The dread of the barren hills and the vast desert was still upon him, increasing at once his sense of dependence upon Gyp and the fear that if he crossed him he might be left to shift for himself. The whisky had

died down, and he welcomed the *marinua* as a lame man welcomes the feel of his crutch in the dark.

"I'd have liked to croak that guy that bawled out my mother," said Gyp presently as they puffed and inhaled. "I may do it yet, at that. But not now. We got other fish to fry.

"By an' by we're goin' to pay a visit to dad an' see what he's got to say when he finds out his own flesh an' blood is up agen it. I don't reckon he's got much cash, but he'll come through an' show his lost son an' heir where that gold mine of his is.

"He'll take us out to it. We'll start before daylight. Wit' the burro, savvy? An' we'll bring out a packful. We'll bury what we can't tote. You can take our first lot to an assayer an' git cash for it. They ain't got your description like they have mine."

He paused to discharge a torrent of foul abuse at his luck and at the modern wireless.

"We'll get through to Chi'," he continued, never lifting his voice above a monotone, even in his cursing. "I'll get this beak of mine straightened an' we'll come back to the place we bury the ore. Then we'll be fixed for a while. It ain't a million, but there'll be enough to make a riffle. An' that horntoad Dan won't do any of the riffling. The old man must be nuttier 'n ever, takin' him in on a grubstake."

"Maybe that was jest a grand stand play," suggested Lefty.

Gyp shifted slightly so as to face him. He said nothing, but Lefty felt a sudden chill menace.

Despite the *marinua* he began to sense clearly the manner in which Gyp appraised him. He had always been tolerated in the gang quartet, his advice never asked for or referred to. Always he had been hanger-on, rather than comrade, although outwardly his standing was equal and spoils' division fair. A split into ten parts. Three shares apiece for the inside 'workers,' two for the outside men.

Now more than ever he felt his limitations as compared with Gyp. Coupled up with him he felt as cheerful as a rat paired with a mongoose.

Deep inside of him Lefty felt that Gyp never intended him to share the bulk of the gold, if they got hold of it. It was the gold of Gyp's father, to begin with. Gyp hailed himself already as the heir.

He would let Lefty help him, let him take the risk of selling the ore for cash, use him as far as Chicago and then lose him—one way or another. But he never intended Lefty to get back to where they would bury the main treasure.

Lefty did not believe much in filial affection. If the old man wouldn't come through, Gyp would stick him up without a qualm. That part of it would be all right.

But, though Lefty had seen much of gang loyalty, and although he himself would have resisted hard against becoming a snitch, he knew what double crossing was, and he laid his own plans to circumvent any that Gyp might be tucking away in the back of his head.

So the two brains worked back of the bowlder, their true faculties diverted by the drug, hatching out spawn of evil, plotting and counter plotting.

"We'll pass the time of night with dad," Gyp took up the talk again. "An' we'll wait until the camp turns in. They'll close up Dan's Place about three.

"We'll be out on the desert by sun-up with the burro an' the old man. I reckon his ledge is somewheres across the other side. We ought to pitch there soon after sundown.

"We can make our clean-up after dark. I fetched the 'lectric torch from the car. We'll get the first train goin' East soon as we strike a town where we can sell the ore. It'll be Rhyolite, maybe, or Bullfrog. We'll maybe have to stick up some guy in a car."

"What 'll you do with the old man?"

"I'll leave him an' the guy we take the car from in a place where they won't be tellin' what they know in a hurry.

"Maybe the old man won't mind grubstaking his own flesh an' blood he's so proud about. He don't want the name of Galt dragged through the mud, see? He'll likely keep his mouth shut. Say, what are you worryin' about anyway?"

"You're sure thinkin' of everything," placated Lefty. "I was thinkin' we'd just

as well not bump any one off. This broadcasting—"

"Yah! You an' your thinkin'! I'm runnin' this. Maybe you don't like the way I do it?"

Lefty knew that death was very close to him. Gyp's eventual thought would be to get rid of him. The one present barrier was that he would fear a shot would arouse the camp and spoil bigger things.

It was the *marinua*—the Mary Ann. It made even him—Lefty—courageous. He had used to be like a starved, broken-spirited mongrel pup, slinking along to escape persecution. *Marinua* and other drugs in different degrees had made him buck up, sometimes become an aggressor.

But Gyp it turned to a thing of constant menace, with the will to kill. Wisely, Lefty kept his tongue silent.

Gyp had a wrist watch, and from time to time he looked at it, striking a match. Lefty felt inclined to hunger, now that the drug was reaching its culmination. To smoke more would be to get reaction.

At present Lefty was at the peak of its virulent influence. His attitude was precisely that of a beast out to appease appetite. If the old miner resisted against providing food, money, liquor, Lefty would kill cold-bloodedly. For the moment he felt himself the equal of Gyp in such will for evil.

And, if he nerved himself sufficiently, he would be able to cope with Gyp by taking the initiative. He might be able to turn the tables on Gyp—to double-cross him.

The only drawback was that Gyp had all the supply of *marinua*. He knew how to make it; a Mexican girl had taught him. Lefty barely knew one weed from another. He wondered how much of the drug Gyp had along, and whether he could not pilfer some from him. Lefty was a pretty fair pickpocket.

"All right!" said Gyp suddenly. "Come along."

VII.

SMOKE was rising from the shack's stove pipe. They tried vainly to look in through the window. But the door was only on the latch.

It opened softly, but a draft must have reached the stove where Galt stood with his back to them stirring something in a pot. He turned instantly as the two came in and closed the door behind them.

The old-timer showed no nervousness, but surveyed them as an old buffalo bull might a couple of coyotes sneaking up a draw to get him on the flanks. That he recognized there was no friendly motive to the visit was evident. Not to welcome the stranger is a wide breach of Western hospitality.

George Galt did not even nod, much less greet them with "Howdy." He looked at them with steady eyes, that appraised and held a faint contempt for these undersized city dwellers who had come to him for aid, for sanctuary. It is probable that he surmised their capacity for matters more sinister, but despised their ability of enforcement.

"Is it Dick?" he asked before Gyp could utter the "Hello, dad!" with which he had rather trusted to establish a situation to his own advantage. "I warn't exactly expectin' you, but I was hearin' about ye to-night. I'd know ye ennywhar, nose or no nose. So you've smelled me out, have ye?

"Wal, now you can git out, both of ye. I'm forgittin' this visit, becos I was married to yore mother, for one reason. Tother is that you're both liable to be nabbed before the sun's up an hour. There's five hundred reward out for ye. Now scoot."

The tolerance in his voice was strained; it would not stand a severe test. He frowned as he saw the pair exchange a glance and stand their ground. Galt fancied he knew men—but he did not know *marinua*.

"We heard all about that," said Gyp. "Heard you ravin' about what a Galt would do an' would not do. Well, I'm a Galt. An' I've done what they say I've done. I ain't crawling. I don't figure you to have a Galt put in jail with the name of Galt in all the papers an' a Galt doin' a long stretch.

"We're up against it, and we're willing to make a get-away where you won't be bothered with us. You must provide the long green an' save the sacred name."

Gyp spoke with a sneer that was close to a snarl. He felt the urge of the *marinua* within him. His dulled reason told him that all they wanted was money.

But he hated the old man standing big and grave before him—hated him with all his instincts, as a weasel hates a dog, and all his desire was to strike. He battled with that longing, threw it, gripped it.

"You've carried the name of Galt," said the old-timer, "becos I give it to yore mother. That's the only right you've got to it. I said up thar to Dan's that no flesh an' blood of mine 'ud ever do what they're after you for.

"You've no guts to make a livin' for yoreself, so you plan to steal the savin's an' earnin' of better folks than you are. Call yoreselves brave when you've got the drop on a man—or a woman—or mebbe just a kid. Robbin' an' murderin'.

"Yore kind are fruit for trees that don't grow fruit as a rule. They handled yore kind better fifty years ago. Hung 'em first an' tried 'em afterward.

"Git out!" The gray eyes flashed, the big form stood erect and powerful, one great hand on the wooden butt of the six-gun. "You're no flesh an' blood o' mine, thank God! You was two years old when I married yore mother. I'm still givin' you the chance."

Gyp had his arms folded across his chest, his city-bleached face startlingly white, incongruous with his rough clothes. He looked not unlike a white rat, cornered and ready to fight.

"Willing to save the name of Galt?" he sneered.

"I'll take care of the name of Galt," said its owner with a little nod of emphasis. "I ain't goin' to talk to you agen. Last call. *Git!*"

"I'm just as glad not to be any of your breed," said Gyp. "Not that it 'd have made any difference. We ain't goin' to get out an' you're goin' to come through, just the samey."

The six-gun started out from the holster quickly enough, considering Galt's infrequent practice, but far too slow.

Gyp's right hand had been set on the grip of his automatic in the shoulder holster. It came out of that handy sheath, the speediest draw for any gun, a streak of dark blue metal. A split second later Lefty had his gun ready.

Gyp laughed.

"Sit down, daddy, old grand daddy," he mocked. "You're too old-fashioned and slow on the draw. Handling a pick's more in your line. You sit down and take a little rest while we talk to you. Lefty, you frisk him."

He drew his other gun. Galt watched him narrowly. He read correctly the cold glitter in Gyp's eyes. He saw there the lust of the killer.

And, for all his years, he was far from tired of life. He had just won the prize for which he had struggled with the desert for many weary years and he intended to enjoy it.

Despite what the man had said in Dan's Place, Galt had well defined ideas of leisure. The squab farm had been a jest, but a quiet cabin, with time to read of all the world's progress while he had been marking time in the desert places—that was Galt's dream. And he was taking no chances with this city by-product, primed to slay.

There also was the name of Galt to be cared for. A fine old name with a good record. His own and that of his forefathers. He had been careless when he shared it with a woman and let her bestow it upon her own child bred he knew not how.

Now it behooved him to be particularly careful. These two varmints with their guns were deadly as sidewinders met in the dark.

"He's got a lot to answer fur, one way an' another," he muttered.

"What's that?"

"I was talkin' about the man who invented repeatin' guns, Dick," said Galt mildly.

"It ain't the gun, it's the guy who handles it," Gyp asserted. He was getting his own way, his cleverness had asserted itself; the old man acknowledged his mastery—lucky for him he did.

His finger had been cuddling the trigger with an ache to squeeze it. If the old fool had defied him he'd have plugged him, and

there would have been no gold—no Chicago.

"What you find, Lefty?"

Galt had submitted tamely to the frisking process, aided it. Neither of the gangsters saw the glint—almost of mirth—in his eyes. He had not given up the game.

Lefty displayed a slab of tobacco marked by strong teeth, an old-fashioned watch key, a box of matches, a silver watch, a pipe, a knife, a worn fifty-cent luck piece, some agate and topaz pebbles, a bunch of keys and the stub of a pencil.

"Not much in the way of loot," said Galt. "I don't see where I help you much."

"Don't you? You've struck that old find of yours. I remember the specimens. A hundred and fifty bucks a pound you said it was. Mother used to talk about it."

"Yes. I reckon she would."

"You shut up. She's dead, damn you!"

A gleam of something like respect showed in the miner's eyes.

"Let her rest in peace, Dick," he said.

"You're goin' to start for that ledge before sun-up, an' we're goin' wit' you. See? You're goin' to take the burro. No monkey business.

"You don't work off any fool's gold on us. The ledge has got to match the stuff you showed up there at Dan's. Where is it?"

"I left it thar. For drinks."

"Well, let it go. Only you can't fool us. Don't try to."

"You aimin' to cross the Valley along of me an' Jinny?"

"That's what I said."

"Jinny ain't fit to make the trip."

"She'll make it anyway. She don't have to pack nothing goin' out. You can tote her load; you're so damned careful of her. We'll go straight an' we don't have to take much grub. Four or five meals, water, a sack or two and your pick an' shovel."

"I didn't know you remembered that much about minin', Dick. You used to say you had no use for the desert." Galt's tone was placating. "But I wish you w'u'dn't take Jinny."

"You ain't doin' any wishin' from now on."

"Just as you say, Dick. On'y"—a hint of resistance crept into his voice, strengthened—"what if I won't go?"

"Then you'll stay here—right along—until your friends find you!"

"I don't believe you'd do that, Dick. You w'u'dn't git nothin' by it. I don't believe you've got the guts." Galt narrowly observed his stepson. He had decided that there was less danger from Lefty.

Gyp grinned, showing his unevenly spaced teeth, gold set.

"I'd just as soon kill you as not," he said. "Get that right in your noodle. I want the gold. If you don't turn it over I stand a good show of getting caught. I'd owe you a grudge for that, and I'd pay it with a bullet whether you were my father or not."

Galt studied him curiously.

"I believe you w'u'd," he agreed simply.

Gyp nodded. "You get your stuff together. We'll get the burro. We'll travel while it's cool."

"All right, Dick. You've got me in a cleft stick. I hate to give up that ledge. Half of it is Dan's, you know."

"I'll will it to him!"

"You remind me a heap of a reptile, Dick," said Galt. "You ain't got no human feelin's. You don't care who you strike."

"I told you to cut out the thinkin' and the wishin'. Now you can cut out the talkin'. An' you can rustle us some grub."

VIII.

Before the shadows of the eastern range had retreated from the desert, changing it from a wash of gray to a dazzling, uneven expanse of alkali powder and crust, four figures of old George Galt, Gyp, Lefty, and the limping but pertinacious Jinny, were far out in Death Valley. They could not be seen from Crystal, even if the heat devils had not begun their day-long dance.

The old miner walked with an easy, accustomed stride. The two gangsters soon lost all superfluous energy, but toiled on doggedly. After their meal they had again spurred themselves with the *marinua*, the supply now almost exhausted. Their heavy

clothes became almost insupportable as they plugged on.

The desert floor, far below sea level, became flooded with hot sunrays and formed a torment to feet encased in chafing boots. Under their garments the gunmen perspired from every pore, draining their bodies of moisture. Soaked through to the surface, they divested themselves of coats and flung them on the patient Jinny. Galt bore a pack.

Gyp's leather holster strap irked him, but he clung to it. He had filled with water all the canteens in the miner's shack.

Prominent in his own brain, and impressed by him upon Lefty, was the fact that they must keep up with the old man for the sake of speed. There was still a chance of them beating the news of the bank incident across the desert. It was only an infernal chance that had made the Crystal stage driver pick up the details.

They must bring the old man down to their pace if they could not match his. And they must be constantly on the lookout for tricks.

Water they must take sparingly or he might outwit them with his possible knowledge of a water hole. It was a patent fact that he could stand more of desert hardship than they could, for all his age. His physique, as giant to pygmies, was emphasized in this lonely solitude. Here nature seemed to dare them to adventure and silently arrayed unseen forces that steadily attacked, sapping energy, seeking a weak spot in their armor.

Sand storms, whirlwinds of stinging alkali, danced about them. The heat mocked them with mirages. Sometimes the eastern range seemed to swim high above the proper horizon. Occasionally a venomous sidewinder wriggled over the shifting sand.

Now and then they came across the remains of a wagon, a warped and broken wheel with the tire beside it, unrusted in the dry air; scraps of canvas, a broken wagon pole. A scattering of legbones, shoulder blades, apart; the skull still farther off, the clean gray vertebrae stretched out like the skeleton of a snake. Nothing green, nothing living but the reptiles.

Lefty felt the sun beating on his skull like drum strokes, and the horror of the place tortured him as with physical blows.

There was no trail, no vestige of a trail. Galt was leading them deep into the desert, relying on his superior strength. It would be best to shoot him and turn back. Lefty's tongue was mushrooming with thirst, clinging to his palate, sticking there.

Gyp forbade him water although the canteens were still nearly full. Lefty lunged along, filled with hate, his eyes burning, the lids scorched. But Gyp brought up the little procession.

Presently, thought Lefty, he would make a bolt before he went mad. Deeper and deeper they went into the death trap. He might find his way out by their trail. Better to chance the law than this. They didn't have his description. Gyp acknowledged that.

The heat had its way with him. Incessant torture, constant weakening. The gold was worth nothing. Liberty—the get-away—was a joke while they were in this furnace. But old Galt stalked ahead of him, Jinny limped beside him, Gyp scuffed behind.

They made a little halt at noon. Galt gave the burro half his own share of water. The little beast was plainly distressed. Galt did not look at the two gangsters, but gazed out into the desert, silently.

Gyp conserved the water jealously. Yet sunset found only a few inches in the bottom of each canteen. In thick, furry tones he asked Galt the location of the next spring.

"Thar's one not fur from the ledge," said the miner crisply.

They made a cold meal at sunset. Gyp and Lefty took the last of the *marinua*, and it did not have much effect. It was as hard to stimulate their stressed fibers as it is to tune worn violin strings.

Lefty thought longingly of the Chink's: of *yen hok* and Edna cooking the pill. He was fagged out. His arms and legs seemed weighted with leaden hands and feet.

"Three miles to go," Galt announced.

They were right under the eastern range with its folded foothills and its naked, jagged peaks. Beyond lay Nevada and the railroad.

Gyp intended to make the old man show them a pass through the range before he dismissed him. That the dismissal would be a grim one, Lefty did not doubt. Gyp had Galt's gun on his own belt.

The last of the sunlight moved on up the cliffs, lingered on the crags and was gone, touching a few clouds, high up, for a brief glowing caress. The sky changed to olive, to indigo. Stars rushed out. It was cold, and the gangsters shivered, putting on the coats that Jinny had borne.

They had no fire, no warm food. The old prospector appeared untouched by fatigue. He had chewed tobacco throughout the day, and after dark cut up the plug and smoked it. Silent as a stone image he watched the gangsters in the starlight, drawing on their magic cigarettes.

He had hardly expected them to last the trip. Now he waited their next move, his own planned. It was getting toward the end of the game.

"Let's go," croaked Gyp. He felt the clutch of his endurance slipping, but he knew delay was hazardous.

They stumbled on, led by Galt, over rocky outcrops, into shallow gulches, into a deep ravine. Galt stopped and took bearings by a notch in the crest of the ridge.

"Right nigh," he said.

The gunmen quivered with swift excitement. It was the end of the trail where the gold lay; the key to freedom and to enjoyment.

Gun in hand, Gyp followed him as he cast about for the ledge, his electric torch in his other hand. He had been tempted to throw it away a hundred times during the day, together with the extra guns, but he had clung to them, and now—

"No funny tricks," he managed to gasp. "Come clean."

Galt stopped and kicked at a low pile of rock.

"Thar's yore gold," he said.

The beam of the torch shot out onto crumbly brown rock, like dark taffy. Here and there were gleams as if some one had dusted the ledge with flakes of gilt. There were lighter, rusty spots.

Lefty crowded in. The pair gazed spellbound. Gyp essayed a chuckle of triumph.

"We win. Git busy with yore pick, old man."

There was no response. Gyp whirled, swinging his ray. There was a slight sound, hard to be located in the echoing ravine, strewn with ledge and bowlder, split with lateral gulches. Then silence.

The spot light sprayed to its limit without disclosing a trace of living thing. Jinny and her master had vanished as completely as if the cañon had opened to swallow them. Galt had made his move, knowing his mountain side. It was checkmate!

Lefty let out a harsh sound, half shriek of rage, half cry for mercy. He had feared all along that he would be abandoned in this Valley of Death. The canteens were empty.

Galt might have lied about the water close by or, if he had told the truth, how were they to find it? All that they had was the gold, and that mocked them.

In a shaken moment, his nervous system undermined by the drug and the fearful march, he pulled his gun and fired at wild random. The reports echoed and reechoed, flashes stabbing through the night, fragments of rock falling where the bullets hit. Then Gyp was upon him.

"You damned fool!" he growled. "Only chance we had in all the world was to hear him. I've got a mind—"

Lefty, now crazed by fear, fired point-blank at him—his last cartridge.

There came a thud to the madman's skull as if a giant had slapped him. He staggered back half a step and then all his body seemed to dissolve, his senses left him. Silence, blackness, void—

Gyp's unerring bullet had torn through Lefty's brain.

IX.

A MILE away, deep in a masked gorge, beside a little spring where there grew some scanty but nourishing feed, Galt spoke to the burro.

"Git a good rest, Jinny; that's what you need most. We'll go slow. Everything ahead of us. Grub cached by the ledge when we need it. Tobacco'll last me long enough, I reckon. Then we'll go pick up them canteens.

"Sounded like them two had a duel, Jinny. Pair of bad ones. Killers. We'll snake along the side hill an' take a look in the mornin'.

"They ain't goin' to last long ennyway. Don't desarve to. Why, that kind of truck ain't half as human as you are.

"But I don't believe I'll tell the sheriff about 'em. We don't need that reward, an' it'd look too much like blood money, although Dick's no son o' mine. An' it w'u'dn't do to have the old name dragged through the muck of trial an' conviction.

"Also the jury might let 'em off too easy. They ain't the sort to let loose. Worse 'n snakes. Like mad dorgs.

"So I reckon we won't tell the sheriff. We'll let the desert look after 'em. What say, ol' side-pardner?"

He pulled softly at the long ears. The aged burro, strange mixture of docility and stubbornness, balky but faithful, stretched her neck until her gray muzzle was horizontal, bared her yellow teeth and brayed. The discordant notes were multiplied and broadcast far out into the desert from the sounding boards of the rocks, vibrating powerfully in the dry, rare air.

To Gyp, wounded by Lefty's last bullet, delirious, scrabbling insanely for water in the scorching sand that flanked the ledge of gold, it sounded like distant laughter.

THE END.

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THE SAND STORM

MAD speeds the wind, the sand whirls high,
An orange blur obscures the sky;
The bared breast of the desert wild
With shifting dunes is deeply piled.
No trace is left of winding trail,
And stumbling steps must blindly fail.
No lightnings flash from whirlwind clouds
That wrap the scene in stifling shrouds;
No thunder shakes the lonesome plain,
Nor falls one drop of pitying rain,
Sharp gravels hiss through burdened air,
And strip the writhing grease-wood bare.

Ten thousand demons ride the blast,
Ten thousand shrieks go swirling past;
The desert creatures haste away
To distant foothills vague and gray.
O'ertaken travelers struggle on,
Until both hope and strength are gone,
Then fall where bleaching bones lie grim,
And refuge seek in sand-drifts dim.
Its fury spent, the mad storm dies,
The desert calm, clear, miraged lies.
Serene and fair the new day's light
Reveals no trace of the wind-fiend's flight.

Addison Howard Gibson.

The Double Chance

By J. S. FLETCHER

Author of "The Middle Temple Murder," etc.

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PART I.

CLINTON MANNERSLEY had been accused and convicted of forgery by his uncle, Sir Robert Mannersley. Now, when his term of imprisonment has nearly expired, he escapes from Dartmoor. Secretly he sends a note to Sir Robert's daughter, Phillipa, whom he loves. In this he makes known his escape, and protests his innocence. Phillipa never believed him guilty, but now the wild tone of his letter alarms her, and she makes known its contents to a sturdy miner, Jim Britten, Clinton's foster-brother. Jim feels sure that Clinton will come straight to him, and his expectations are fulfilled the same night. Unknown to either, the meeting is witnessed by a man, who steals silently away into the darkness.

Clinton and Phillipa then meet. Clinton urges upon her the necessity of an interview between her father and himself, so that he may once again declare his innocence. Phillipa gives him a key by which he can easily gain access to Sir Robert's study. When they part, Clinton learns that the police are on his track, and he remains in hiding. The next evening, under cover of the darkness, he finds his way to the castle. Entering the study, he thinks at first that the room is empty, but, then, to his horror, he sees that Sir Robert has fallen across his desk. Turning to cry for help, he finds himself in the grip of a stern-faced man, and realizes with sickening fear that he is suspected of murder. The man is Mark Quinton, the colliery manager, who also loves Phillipa. At Clinton's arraignment a man named Lioney Moore is called to testify.

CHAPTER V (*continued*).

THE WEB OF CIRCUMSTANCE.

LIONEY MOORE was a little, wizened man, with ferret-like eyes and a sharp nose, and his face was much blackened with the obvious results of some explosion of bygone years. He was the most unconcerned man in the court, and placidly chewed a length of straw.

"You are Lioney Moore, residing in Europa Street, Mannersley, and you are a miner?" began the prosecuting solicitor.

"I'm Lioney Moore, and I am a coal miner—when there's naught better to do," answered the witness nonchalantly.

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for March 10

"Three nights ago, at midnight, you were at Dead Man's Cross, in the woods?"

"That's right, guv'nor, I was."

"What were you doing there?" suddenly interpolated one of the magistrates, upon whose land Dead Man's Cross was situated.

The witness looked archly at the solicitor, and the latter cast a glance of meaning at the bench.

"I think, your lordships, that we need scarcely go into the question of why the witness was at that particular portion of the globe at that particular hour," he said, dryly. "You were there, Moore?"

"I've said I were," replied the witness.

"And you were hidden behind a tree where the roads meet?"

"Aye!"

"Something happened—something unusual?"

"Very unusual, I should say," replied Moore.

"Tell the court in your own way what it was."

"Well, it were this here. It were what I call a half moon-lit night; you could see nicely—"

"Nicely enough to poach one of my hares, I'll be bound," said, half audibly, the magistrate who had previously interrupted.

"And from where I were, which was behind that there high hedge at Dead Man's Cross, I could see straight down the road as comes from Stalford—the high road," continued the witness. "A motor carriage come along and stops. There were two men in it. One of 'em gets out. I heard him speak, and I knew it were Mr. Clinton there."

"How did you know he was Mr. Clinton?"

"'Cause I heard his voice."

"You had often heard his voice before?"

"Aye, many a hundred times!"

"What happened then?"

"What happened then," continued Moore, glancing at the prisoner, "was that Mr. Clinton and the chap what was in the motor talked a bit, in a sort o' whispering, you'll understand, and then Mr. Clinton turns in my direction. The other chap says, 'Well, good-by, then, and stand up to him, Mannersley; and Mr. Clinton says, 'I'll have it out with him, no fear, Warriner,' or some such name. Then the other chap set off northward, and Mr. Clinton he turned into the woods."

"You followed him along the path through the wood?"

"Yes, I did. All the same, I knew where he'd make for, and I followed him there."

"Where was that?"

"Why, to Jim Britten's cottage! 'Cause Jim's his foster-brother, d'ye see?"

"You saw the prisoner enter James Britten's cottage?"

"I did, and, what's more, I heard him and Jim talking inside, though, of course, I couldn't make out what was said. And I should have kept a watch on that cottage, 'cause I know very well as Mr. Clinton's time wasn't up, and that he'd broken out, only I went home to get a bit of a sleep and something to eat, and I overslept myself, and it was late in the afternoon when I told the inspector what I'd seen, and he gave me a rare pitching-in-to, for not telling him sooner. Howsomever, I kept an eye on Jim Britten."

"You mean you watched Britten's movements?"

"Yes. 'Cause I knew something was up."

"Well, what did you see of Britten with relation to this case?"

"Why, at breaking-off time, instead of going home, as he generally does, Britten he went up the castle way and meets his sweetheart, that lass of Riley's as is Miss Phillipa's maid, and I see him give her a letter—leastways, what looked like one. They talked for a bit, just there by that little gate as opens into the castle grounds, and she went in, and Jim went away homeward."

"What is the relevancy of this particular piece of evidence?" asked the chairman.

"That, your worship, I shall proceed to show in due course," answered Mr. Parke. "You can stand down, Moore. Your worships, I now—"

At this juncture some commotion was caused at the rear of the court by the entrance of two men, one of whom was immediately recognized by some of the magistrates and functionaries as Mr. Miller Stan-

ford, a leading criminal barrister of that circuit; the other as a local solicitor. Stanford forced his way to the table.

"Your worships," he said, "I crave pardon for what may seem an interruption, but I have only just been instructed on behalf of the prisoner. I understand that the hearing has scarcely begun, but that your worships have decided to hear the evidence which the prosecution will offer?"

Rowland Parke, waiting with obvious impatience until the chairman had answered Stanford's question in the affirmative, turned to the usher.

"Call Mr. Mark Quinton."

CHAPTER VI.

DAMNING EVIDENCE.

IT was already well known to those who packed the court to its last inch of standing room that Quinton had actually apprehended Sir Clinton Mannersley in the murdered man's room, and there was a buzz of expectation as he made his way into the witness-box.

There was no one present to whom he was not known, nor was there any one there who did not marvel at his appearance. The usually vigorous, forceful, self-assertive man, a picture of health at all times, looked as if he had gone through some terrible shock. His face was white and drawn, there were heavy circles about his eyes; the eyes looked as if they could not shut out some appalling sight. And though men knew that the manager had seen, only a few hours before, one of the most awful scenes on which human eyes can look, they wondered, knowing him for a man of iron nerve, that it should have had such a grave effect upon him.

"You are Mark Valentine Quinton, and for about two years have been manager of Mannersley Main Colliery?" began Parke.

"Yes."

"You were on intimate terms—I mean of a friendly and social nature—with the late Sir Robert?"

"I was."

"And visited a great deal at the castle?"

"A great deal."

"In fact, I may take it that you had the run of the house?"

"Yes."

"You paid a visit there last night. Tell the court what took place as regards that."

"I had occasion to see Sir Robert last night. I went up to the castle about twenty minutes past nine. Dauncey, the butler, who admitted me, told me that Sir Robert was in his study. I was going there, but on my way met Miss Mannersley, who invited me to look at some water color drawings which her father had recently purchased in London and had arrived yesterday. I went with her to the drawing-room to see them, and was there perhaps twenty minutes, perhaps a little longer. Then I went to Sir Robert's study."

"Now, here is a rough sketch or plan of the study," said Parke. "Look at it. There are three entrances marked there. Please explain them to their worships."

Quinton pointed with his forefinger to the large sheet of paper which an attendant held up.

"The study," he said, "is built at an angle of the house. It has a large bow-window facing the lawn. The door on the left hand—that is, regarding the interior of the room from the window—opens into the library. That at the rear opens upon the corridor, which runs the whole length of the ground floor. The door on the right hand opens into the garden—the grounds. A large screen stands before it. The desk which Sir Robert used stands between this screen and the door on the left."

"From which door did you enter last night?"

"I entered from the corridor."

"What did you see?"

Quinton's eyes contracted, and he frowned slightly.

"Immediately on entering the room I saw Sir Robert, lying across his desk, motionless. I saw blood on the papers on the desk. By the screen was a young man, who was retreating backwards from the room. I had never seen him before. I seized him instantly, and as I did so I noticed that there was blood on his right hand and on the white cuff of his shirt."

"You did not know him?"

"I certainly did not know him."

"You called for help?"

"Yes, and Dauncey almost immediately came, with a footman, and Mr. Marshall Stead, who had just entered the house. Dauncey, at sight of the young man, exclaimed 'Mr. Clinton!' Then I knew who it was I had seized."

"The prisoner in the dock is the man you laid hands on?"

"Oh, yes!"

Rowland Parke sat down, and Stanford rose. It was a sort of household proverb in that part of the country that Stanford had got more men off than any barrister living, and the pitmen at the back of the court craned their necks.

"Mr. Quinton," began Stanford, taking off his glasses and speaking in his usual easy fashion, "you told the court, I think, that when you first saw the prisoner he was near the screen, retreating backwards?"

"I did."

"What was his exact position—was he retreating upon the screen, or at the side of the screen, or what?"

"He was retreating in the direction of the screen. A step or two more and he would have hit upon it."

"Oh! Whereabouts would he have hit upon it?"

"Full in the center."

"In the center? How did the prisoner's attitude strike you?"

Quinton did not appear to comprehend the question.

"I say how did his attitude strike you?" repeated Stanford. "Was it that of a guilty man?"

"I did not consider it at the time."

"Ah! Or was it that of a man who had suddenly, without the slightest expectation of doing so, come upon a horrible sight, and was shrinking from it?"

"I did not consider that either."

"Nevertheless, you have described the latter attitude very well," continued Stanford. "You are sure that he was retreating backward upon the center of the screen?"

"I am certain."

"Did you think he was going to penetrate the screen, then, in his effort to reach the door?"

"I thought nothing."

"At any rate, he was not making the best of any opportunity to escape?"

"No, that is so."

"And yet, instead of slowly retreating backwards upon this screen, he could surely have made a precipitate flight by the door which opens upon the garden?"

"I suppose he could."

"You came to the conclusion," continued Stanford, toying with his glasses, "that this man whom you caught was the actual murderer of Sir Robert Mannersley?"

Quinton fingered his mustache nervously. "I don't see what other conclusion I could come to," he answered. "I saw Sir Robert lying across his desk, I saw the knife, I saw this man—"

"And you jumped to a conclusion. That will do, thank you," said Stanford, and sat down, while Quinton left the box, obviously perplexed.

The next witness was Dauncey, the butler, who corroborated the evidence given by the police inspector and Quinton as to the finding of Clinton Mannersley in proximity to the dead man's body. And then came a dramatic incident which caused great excitement in the crowded court. For Rowland Parke produced the weapon which had been used by the assassin—a dagger, two edged, of Eastern workmanship, the delicate arabesque on the blade stained with the victim's blood.

"You saw this dagger, or knife, lying on your master's desk?" asked Parke.

"I did, sir," replied the old butler.

"You know all about it—what it was used for?"

"Quite well, sir. Its place was on a table which stands between my poor master's desk and the screen, a table on which we used to lay out the reviews and magazines that Sir Robert took in."

"It was used as a paper-knife, then?"

"Yes, sir; and I always considered it dangerous, because it was very sharp and pointed, as you can see, sir."

"Now from the position of that table, it would have been an easy thing for anybody entering by the garden door behind Sir Robert to have picked up that knife and plunged it into his body?"

"Yes, sir."

"Sir Robert was, I believe, rather deaf?"

"He was, sir, and lately he had been getting worse."

"Stand down for a moment, Mr. Dauncey. Call Sergeant Johnson, if you please."

"Sergeant Johnson, by instructions, when the prisoner was brought to the police station, you searched him?"

"I did, sir."

"What did you find upon him?"

"I found a purse containing nine pounds, seven shillings, and threepence; a silver cigarette-case, a silver match-box, a penknife, a silver pencil-case, a copy of 'Ruff's Guide to the Turf,' a gold watch and chain, and a key."

"Is this the key?"

"That is the key, sir."

"That will do, Johnson. Call Mr. Dauncey again."

"Mr. Dauncey, do you recognize this key?"

"Yes, sir; quite well."

"What key is it?"

"It is one of two keys made for the garden door in my late master's study, sir."

"Who carried the keys?"

"Sir Robert carried one, sir; Miss Phillipa carried the other."

"Can you say positively which of the two keys this is?"

"Yes, sir, it is Miss Phillipa's. My master's key was—was on his body," answered the old butler.

Rowland Parke turned to the bench.

"I am as anxious as any man can be to keep Miss Mannersley's name out of the case, your worships," he said, "but I shall be obliged to call her at a later stage to give evidence as regards the question of this key. We must know how it came into the prisoner's possession, and—"

Clinton Mannersley, whose apathy had by this time left him, started up from his seat in the dock.

"I can tell you that now!" he exclaimed. "There's no need to drag my cousin into this beastly place and rotten business, and—"

But Stanford had turned round and whispered a word, and the prisoner nodded his head sullenly and reseated himself.

"In the meantime," continued Parke, "there are one or two matters which I wish to elicit from the present witness before he leaves the box. Mr. Dauncey, could the prisoner have gained access to the house except by the private door of the study—the garden door?"

"No, sir."

"And he, of course, had not been admitted at the hall door?"

"Certainly not, sir."

"You know who was admitted last night?"

"Yes, sir, because I was reading the newspaper in my chair in the wine hall from a quarter to nine to the time that—that this happened, sir."

"Who was admitted during that time?"

"Nobody, sir, but Mr. Quinton, at about half past nine, and Mr. Stead, who came just before we heard Mr. Quinton call for help."

"Very well. Now, a final answer from you. You have known the prisoner from boyhood?"

"Yes, sir, and been very fond of him," said Dauncey with a troubled glance at the dock.

"Is it not a fact that he and the late Sir Robert Mannersley did not get on well—that they were on bad terms?"

"They didn't agree, sir," replied the butler reluctantly.

"The prisoner was always of a hot temper, wasn't he?"

"He was quick-tempered, sir."

"Apt to fly into sudden rage, eh?"

"At times, sir—if he was provoked."

"Did he not on one occasion, and, I believe, in your presence, commit a savage assault on a page boy, and half beat him to death with a hunting crop?"

"Yes, sir," replied Dauncey, "and the lad richly deserved all he got!"

Rowland Parke sat down, quite unconcerned by the ripple of laughter, and Stanford rose.

"I suppose, Mr. Dauncey, that you have an opinion of your own about this case?" he said.

The old butler shook his head dolefully. "I'm fairly amazed by it, sir," he said. "But"—and here he held up his head and

looked defiantly all round him—"but I'm sure of this—there's nothing and nobody going to make me believe that Mr.—I beg pardon—that Sir Clinton killed my poor master. No, sir, no—a thousand times no! He was a wild boy, but he wasn't a bad 'un!"

The applause from the back of the court showed where popular opinion held, and Moses Pogmore's voice made itself heard.

"That's reight, owd lad, that's reight! Let 'em find t' real murderer—Mr. Clinton never did it!"

Rowland Parke was on his legs again when order had been restored. He spoke in subdued accents as he turned to the bench.

"I am sorry, your worships, to have to take this course, but I have no option. Call Miss Phillipa Mannersley."

A great hush fell on the court as a door opened and Mark Quinton appeared, leading in the dead man's daughter.

CHAPTER VII.

DR. CHILDE'S STATEMENT.

OF all the people present in court, Clinton Mannersley was most affected by Phillipa's entrance. But while the rest, from magistrates to pitmen, were one and all full of pity and solicitude for the bereaved girl, who had always been a great favorite in the village, Clinton's concern was of a different nature.

He was observant and keen-eyed, and something in Mark Quinton's attitude toward Phillipa, as he led her forward, showed him that the manager was in love with her. And from that moment half his interest and concern in his own critical position left him; he was facing the fact that he had a rival who might be dangerous.

There was a dead silence as Phillipa stepped into the box and raised her veil. A murmur of sympathy arose among the pitmen as they saw that her usually smiling and rosy face was pale and drawn. Rowland Parke dropped the sharp, self-assured manner in which he had examined the other witnesses, and addressed her in soft tones.

"I am deeply regretful, Miss Mannersley, to be obliged to bring you here, but it has been unavoidable, and I will not detain you any longer than I can help. Will you kindly look at this key and tell me if it is yours?"

"It is mine," replied Phillipa.

"This key was found in the—in Sir Clinton's possession last night. Can you tell us how it came into his possession?"

"Yes. I gave it to him."

"When was that?"

"The night before last."

"May I ask for what purpose?"

"I gave him the key in order that he might gain access to my father's study last night."

"Then I take it that you had had an interview with your cousin—night before last?"

"Yes."

Rowland Parke hesitated for a moment, as if he were not quite assured of his next question, and in the silence Clinton called across the court to his cousin.

"Tell them everything, Phillipa—there's no need to keep anything back now!"

Phillipa looked at Parke. "That is what I should wish to do," she said quietly. "There is really nothing to conceal, and perhaps—"

She paused and hesitated. Stanford jumped to his feet.

"I am sure that if Miss Mannersley is good enough to offer any evidence which she feels she would like to offer, your worships and my friend will gladly hear it," he said in his suavest tones.

"Certainly — certainly!" murmured the chairman.

"I should like to say what I know," said Phillipa as Stanford sat down again, "because I—I hope it will be found in my cousin's favor. It is only a few days ago that I heard that my cousin had—had made his escape, and that he was coming to Mannersley. I was made aware of his arrival, and I consented to meet him the night before last at the hermit's cell.

"We met, and he explained to me that he desired an interview with my father for the purpose of strongly urging him to reopen the case of nearly three years ago. We knew that my father would not receive him in the

ordinary way, so I arranged with him that he should enter the study by the garden door next evening at an hour when my father was always alone there. That was why I gave him the key—so that he could admit himself.

"I think it right that you should also know," concluded Phillipa, with a glance at Clinton, "that my cousin gave me his solemn promise that, after the interview with my father, he would at once give himself up to the authorities from whom he had escaped."

There was a ripple of comment and applause at this. As Rowland Parke had evidently no further questions to ask, Stanford rose and turned to the witness box.

"Although you had made or suggested the arrangement, Miss Mannersley, you never actually knew if your cousin was in the house?"

"No, I never knew."

"What time was he to enter the study by the garden door?"

"About half past nine—the time my father was usually there."

"We have heard from Mr. Quinton that he called at the castle about twenty minutes past nine, and was on his way to the study when you met him and asked him to look at some pictures?"

Phillipa nodded her head. "Yes," she said, composedly, "I did that on purpose. I did not want anybody to interrupt the interview between my father and my cousin."

Stanford sat down and helped himself to a pinch of snuff. He glared at Parke, who rose as if in some uncertainty.

"I have nothing more to ask Miss Mannersley," he said.

Phillipa left the box, once more assisted by Quinton. But instead of leaving the court she made a whispered remark to the manager, and a seat was immediately found for her near the solicitors' table. Parke went on speaking.

". . . Nor do I see that there is any necessity to do more now than to ask your worships to commit the prisoner," he continued. "As I said at the commencement of these proceedings there is abundant evidence to justify you in such a course, especially as the Assizes begin at Stelford in a fortnight, and the case can come into the list. I therefore ask your worships to commit the prisoner for trial on the charge preferred against him."

Stanford rose slowly from his seat, and, taking off his spectacles, began to wave them in the characteristic fashion so well known. He favored Rowland Parke with a humorous glance which made that brilliant young gentleman think somehow of a cat playing with a mouse.

"I am sure your worships will agree with me that my friend is an admirable and a praiseworthy specimen of the go-aheadness of our present age," he said with a twinkle in his eye, "and he is certainly destined, if he perseveres in his course, to be an exponent of time-saving methods. But before your worships consider his application, I must crave to put before your worships some evidence which seems to me to be very material to this case, and may alter its complexion very considerably. And having offered that evidence, I shall oppose Mr. Parke's application, and shall ask for an adjournment. Call Walter Fisher."

A young, alert-looking man, trim, clean-shaven, stepped into the witness box.

"You are a footman at the castle?" asked Stanford.

"I am, sir."

"How long have you been there?"

"Three and a half years, sir."

"It has been your duty, whenever Sir Robert was at home, to take into his study at precisely half past nine a tray on which was a decanter of whisky, a siphon of mineral water, and a glass?"

"It has, sir."

"Did you do this last night?"

"I did, sir."

"To the exact minute?"

"To the very minute, sir, by the great clock in the inner hall."

"Was Sir Robert in his study?"

"Yes, sir."

"What was he doing?"

"Writing at his desk, sir."

"Nothing unusual about him?"

"Nothing, sir."

"What did you do after that?"

"I went back to the inner hall, sir."

"Had Mr. Quinton arrived then?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where was he?"

"He had gone into the drawing-room with Miss Mannersley, sir."

"Between that time and the time when Mr. Quinton raised the alarm was any one else admitted to the house?"

"Yes, sir—Mr. Stead."

"What time was that?"

"Exactly twenty minutes to ten, sir."

"What occurred as regards Mr. Stead?"

"Mr. Dauncey told Mr. Stead that Mr. Quinton was just going to see Sir Robert, sir, and Mr. Stead said he would wait in the library."

"Did he go into the library?"

"Yes, sir."

"Is the library next door to the study?"

"Yes, sir."

"And there is a communicating door between them?"

"Yes, sir."

"Now, you heard Mr. Quinton raise the alarm?"

"I did, sir."

"What time was that?"

"I should say, sir, as near as possible it was about ten minutes to ten."

"That would be ten minutes after Mr. Stead's arrival?"

"Yes, sir."

"So that Mr. Stead for ten minutes had been in the next room to Sir Robert?"

"Yes, sir."

"That will do, Fisher. Call Dr. Whittaker Childe."

The doctor, a middle-aged man who was well known in the district as a physician and surgeon of great reputation and who was much noted for the punctilious care which he gave to all his cases, stepped into the box.

"I believe that your residence adjoins the castle?" began Stanford.

"Yes."

"How long would it take you to walk hurriedly from your surgery into the study at the castle?"

"A minute and a half."

"You were in you surgery about ten minutes to ten last night, and you received a telephone message asking you to hurry to the castle?"

"Yes."

"You went at once, and would therefore be in the study within the next two or three minutes at the outside?"

"I was certainly there before five minutes to ten."

"You saw and examined Sir Robert's body at once?"

"I did."

"You ascertained the cause of death?"

"Yes. He had been stabbed through the heart by a blow directed from behind."

"I understand, Dr. Childe, that you have a great reputation for accuracy. I want to put a question to you to which you cannot give too accurate an answer. How long did you consider Sir Robert to have been dead?"

Dr. Childe's answer came with a snap. "Eight minutes."

"Eight minutes! You can give your opinion as nearly as that?"

"Certainly. He had been dead not less than eight nor not more than nine minutes."

"That is to say, if you saw him at nine fifty-four he had been stabbed about or at nine forty-six?"

"Yes."

"Do you consider that death was instantaneous?"

"Yes; that is, what is called instantaneous."

"Which means—"

"Which means what we realize by instantaneous," said Dr. Childe with a smile. "You may take it that it was—instantaneous."

"Very good. Now, I want another of your careful scientific answers to a critical question. When the blow was struck, what would the physical result on Sir Robert be?"

"You mean—would the blow cause any action of his body?"

"That is my meaning, doctor."

"Yes," replied Dr. Childe, "it would, and it did."

"We are told that he was found fallen forward across his desk. Does that mean that when he was stabbed he simply collapsed over the desk, and maintained his sitting position?"

"No, certainly not. What I am sure occurred was this, and I base this on careful

observation of the position of the body. When Sir Robert was struck he leaped to his feet, tottered a moment, and then fell face forward across the desk. He was a tall man, and the desk is an especially wide one, otherwise he would have slipped off it."

"Thank you. Now a question or two more. Would any sound arise from Sir Robert when that blow was struck?"

"Almost certainly. He would utter a groan."

"A loud groan?"

"A very loud groan."

"Loud enough to be heard in the next room?"

"Unless the walls were exceptionally thick—yes."

"You know the relative position of the study and library in this case. Should such a groan have been heard in the library?"

"In my opinion—yes."

"That is, supposing it were uttered?"

"It is, as I have said, morally certain that it would be uttered."

"Thank you, doctor—that is all," said Stanford. He turned to the bench. "I think your worships will agree that we have heard some deeply interesting evidence," he said. "Now, I want to hear what is to be said on this matter by the man who was in the next room! Call Mr. Marshall Stead."

CHAPTER VIII.

A STRANGER LISTENS.

THE man whose name had just been pronounced by Stanford rose slowly from a seat which he had occupied all the morning in the well of the court, almost under the dock, and made his way to the witness box amid a murmur of excitement from the spectators.

Although there was not a single person there who was not as well acquainted with him as with the great wheels of the colliery just outside, they looked at him with a new and absorbing interest, as if they had never seen him before. According to the evidence which they had heard, this man had actually been within a few yards—a few feet—of the victim at the time the fatal blow was dealt; while he had waited there in the library, his employer had been done to death in the study. It was almost as if the crime had been enacted under his very eyes. There was accordingly a strange and weird fascination about him, and as he faced Miller Stanford everything but his presence was forgotten.

The man himself was perhaps the coolest person present—not even excepting the practiced barrister, who was feeling the excitement of the fray. He was not a man of remarkable appearance—rather, he was of a type so familiar in great commercial centers as to pass unnoticed; the type of the highly respectable, conventional clerk, quiet and reserved in manner, the type which one associates with banks and counting houses and mercantile offices.

He was quietly and unostentatiously, but at the same time fashionably dressed in dark clothes. Out of respect for the dead man he had assumed a black cravat; he wore black gloves. As he stood in the witness box he made a somber picture—a picture of black and white, of light and shade. Everything about him was of a consistent neatness; his smooth, dark hair, his carefully trimmed mustache, and his glossy linen. And his face was as quiet as himself; his entire attitude and appearance suggested an infinite composure.

"Mr. Stead," began Stanford, "you are chief cashier of the Mannersley Main Colliery?"

"I am."

"That, I suppose, means that you are really at the head of the financial matters?"

"Under the proprietor—yes."

"How long have you held that post?"

"Five years."

"And what was your previous position?"

"I have held every position in the cashier's department, after entering it ten years ago—from an ordinary clerkship to the chief cashiership."

"And previous to that?"

"I was a booking clerk on the Stelford and Lanchester Railway, and stationed here."

"You naturally enjoyed the late Sir Robert's confidence, seeing that you held a position of such great trust and responsibility?"

"I believe I enjoyed the late Sir Robert's full confidence in every way."

"You occasionally called at the castle?"

"I constantly called at the castle. I called regularly."

"As a visitor, or on business, or what?"

"In both respects. Sir Robert sometimes asked me to dine. I constantly called to see him in the evening on business matters."

"You went there last night—at twenty minutes to ten?"

"Yes."

"And you were shown into the library?"

"I was."

"And remained there until you heard Mr. Quinton call for help?"

"Yes."

"When you entered the study?"

"That is so."

"You went into the study, of course, through the door which communicates with the library?"

"I did."

"Had that door been closed all the time you were in the library?"

"I conclude that it had from the fact that it was certainly closed when I went to Mr. Quinton's assistance."

"You have heard the evidence which has been put before the court to the effect that you were in the library from nine forty to nine fifty. Is that correct?"

"I have no reason to dispute it. I should say it is quite correct."

"You have also heard Dr. Childe affirm positively that Sir Robert must have been murdered at or about nine forty-six, and that there almost certainly—we may take it as certainly—have been two sounds—one, the fall of the body; the other a loud groan. Did you, who were in the next room, a silent apartment, mind, where there was no noise or any sound to disturb you, hear anything of either?"

Everybody in court regarded Marshall Stead eagerly as this question was put to him. He answered it as coolly as he had answered all the others.

"I heard nothing."

"Absolutely nothing?"

"Absolutely nothing."

Stanford paused for a moment and seemed to be reflecting. He presently went on:

"You know the interior arrangements of the castle well?"

"Very well indeed, as regards the lower rooms, the reception rooms."

"Don't you think it a strange thing that you should have heard nothing in the library of what was going on in the next room?"

"I should think it a strange thing that I heard nothing if the murder actually happened during the ten minutes I was waiting there. In fact, such a possibility is to me inconceivable."

"But you have heard Dr. Childe's testimony."

Marshall Stead made no reply.

"From your knowledge of the house can you say if the walls between the study and the library are very thick, and if the door is a very close-fitting one?"

"Yes, I can. That has struck me while this matter has been under discussion. The library and study are in the oldest part of the house—the part which projects into the grounds—and the walls are of very old masonry and very thick indeed. The door is deeply inset in that between the library and study."

"But it is otherwise an ordinary, well-fitting door?"

"So far as I know—yes."

"And of course it has a keyhole, and will not fit like a glove at the bottom?"

"I have never examined it, though I have passed through it hundreds of times."

The chairman interposed. "Don't you think, Mr. Stanford, that it would be an easy thing to make some experiments on this question?" he said. "It would surely be possible to ascertain definitely if such sounds as those spoken of by Dr. Childe could be heard from the study to the library."

"I am much obliged to your worship for the suggestion," said Stanford. "It is one which I was about to make. Thank you, Mr. Stead—that is all I have to ask you. Your worships, I have to ask you to give me an opportunity of consulting with my client and his solicitor. If your worships would adjourn for ten minutes—"

"We will adjourn for half an hour," said the chairman.

Stanford, the solicitor, and Clinton Mannersley, who was closely guarded by several officers, disappeared into the lower regions of the police court; the magistrates retired into their private room. Nobody else left the court, and the long-pent-up excitement vented itself in comment and discussion. It seemed as if everybody began to talk at once, and Quinton, who had remained near Phillipa, bent down to her.

"Won't this noise be too much for you?" he said. "Hadn't I better take you out?"

"No, thank you," she said, wearily. "I want to hear the magistrates' decision. Do you see the man who has just come in there, Mr. Quinton—the man who is talking to Mr. Illingworth?"

Quinton glanced across the court, and saw the man she indicated. He was a little, soberly dressed man, middle aged, and having pretty much the appearance of an undertaker, seeing that everything about him was very decorous and solemn from the top of his bald head to the points of his well-polished boots.

He carried an old-fashioned silk hat—very wide in the brim and very high in the crown—in one hand, and an equally old-fashioned umbrella in the other, and was altogether something of an oddity. But what Quinton most remarked about him was that his clean-shaven face was literally one mass of curious wrinkles—there were wrinkles about his eyes, his mouth, his chin—there were wrinkles everywhere. And out of all these wrinkles, from beneath a pair of bushy gray eyebrows, peeped out a pair of eyes as black as coal, and as sharp and penetrating as a ferret's.

"Yes," said Quinton, "I see him. A quaint, interesting figure, isn't he? Do you know him, Miss Mannersley?"

"Yes," she answered, still watching the little man. "He is a famous Scotland Yard detective—Inspector Cortelyou. It was he who took charge of the case when some of my jewelry was stolen from our town house last summer, and who traced the thieves. He is very clever and very interesting. Do you think he can have come down about—about this, Mr. Quinton?"

"I should say so," replied Quinton. "And—"

He was interrupted at that point by the return of Stanford and the solicitor for the defense. Presently the magistrates came back into court, and Clinton was brought back to the dock. Stanford at once rose.

"During the last few minutes, your worships," he said, "I have had a short conversation with my client, and, in consequence of what he has said, I am going to take a very unusual course, but a course which I feel absolutely justified in taking. After what you have heard it must be evident that this case must be adjourned for expert evidence on certain obvious points. But the prisoner is anxious—painfully anxious—to make a statement to you from the dock, and though it is more usual for legal advisers in these circumstances to counsel their clients to say nothing, I think it well to let mine speak. That is, of course, with your worships' permission."

The chairman, after a whispered consultation with his colleagues, bowed his head in token of assent.

"Very good, Mr. Stanford," he said.

Clinton, resting his hands on the front of the dock, looked at Phillipa. He held up his head after that look, and faced the magistrates with something of pride.

"Look here," he said, with a species of boyish simplicity that carried him still farther into the affection of the crowd, "I'm nothing of a speaker, as most of you know, but I can tell the truth in a plain way. Well, the truth's this, as far as I'm concerned. I made my escape from Dartmoor for two reasons. The first was that I should have been a fool if I hadn't when I had the chance I had. And I could have been in America or Canada now, but for the second reason—I wanted to see my uncle. I wanted to beg of him, to pray of him, to reopen that beastly business of nearly three years ago—you all know what I mean.

"I wanted to convince him of the truth of my innocence of that. I'll acknowledge that I felt hard about his treatment of me. Just because I'd been a bit racketty at Eton and Cambridge, and had got into an awful hole in the way of debt, he seemed to think that I was an out-and-out rotter,

whereas, really, I'm not, if you only knew me—I was only a bit—well, you know—and I always meant to shake down into a real steady-going sort—I did indeed!

"Well, when I got here, the other day, I managed to see my cousin, and what she told you in her evidence is true, of course. Now, I hid in the shrubbery in the castle garden last night, right opposite the private door, until I thought my uncle would be in the study and alone. I knew the habits of the house, you know. Well, at last I opened the door and went in. Of course, I couldn't see into the room at first, because of the screen. It all seemed strangely silent.

"When I stepped round the screen I saw—well, what I never expected to see. I must have turned faint, or sick, or something, because my recollections are not very clear on this point. But I do remember that I went up to—to him, and touched him, and I felt he was dead, and just dead! That was how I got the—the blood on my shirt cuff and my sleeve that Mr. Quinton spoke of. You see, I hadn't noticed it. And I shrank back, feeling as if I was going to drop—and that was when Quinton entered from the corridor and collared me. And that's the truth—and I can't say any more. But it is the truth!"

With another glance at Phillipa, who had listened to him with parted lips and eager eyes, Clinton stepped back amidst a murmur of applause from the pitmen which nothing could stop. And suddenly from among them, rising high above their clamor, came a stentorian voice, which forced itself upon everybody—

"Aye, lad, it *is* the truth; it's the real truth! And I can prove it!"

CHAPTER IX.

UNEXPECTED HELP.

IN the very thick of the closely packed mass of pitmen at the back of the court a man had risen and was endeavoring to attract the attention of the bench by violent gesticulation. He was a tall, loosely built fellow of apparently twenty-eight or thirty, and was chiefly remarkable for the possession of a crop of carroty hair, an enormous mustache of the same color, and a long, sharp nose.

That he was making a holiday was evident from the fact that he wore what was obviously his best suit of blue serge, and had a silk handkerchief of at least six different colors knotted about his throat.

"I can prove it!" he shouted again. "I can prove it!"

The chairman bent over to the clerk. "Isn't that the man we sent to prison recently?" he said. "Wasn't he here for assault?"

"Yes, sir, it's Dick King—Ginger King, as they call him," replied the clerk. "He went for a fortnight. His time was only up yesterday."

"I say I can prove it!" vociferated Ginger King.

The chairman looked across at the interrupter with some impatience. "What is it you can prove?" he demanded.

"I can prove that what Mestur Clinton there has just telled yer's true," replied King.

The chairman looked at Stanford. Stanford jumped to his feet.

"I do not know what this witness's evidence may be worth, your worships," he said, "but I should like to hear it. Will you step down to the witness box, my friend?"

Ginger King obeyed this summons with alacrity, and went through the process of being sworn with great solemnity.

"What is your name, my friend, and your occupation?" asked Stanford.

"Name's Richard King, only they call me Ginger in generals," answered the witness; "and I'm a collier."

"Well, what do you know about this?"

"I know 'at what Mestur Clinton there's just telled yer is true."

"How do you know it is true?"

"'Cause I can prove it's true. Didn't I say so?"

"Now, then, just tell the court what you know," said Stanford, who saw that he had a curious customer to deal with. "Tell it in your own way."

"That's what I were going to do at first if ye hadn't talked so much," said King.

"Ye see, it's this here way. Two week sin' I had a bit of a do wi' Jack Green about yon there pup o' mine, and I belted Jack reight, and so t' magistrates there sent me to Stelford Gaol for a fortnit, 'cause I wouldn't pay t' fine. Well, I come out yesterday, and, of course, I thowt 'at I'd tak' a holiday for a day or so.

"Now, there's a young ooman in sarvice up at t' castle 'at I'm a bit sweet on, and I bethowt misen last night 'at I'd go up and see if I could see owt on her, 'cause sometimes when I've whistled 'at t' kitchen window she's come out into t' garden, d'ye see? Well, I goes up, and I'd just climbed over t' wall into t' shrubbery, when I sees Mestur Clinton there nip across to a door. I could see him reight fair, 'cause he crossed between two lighted windows. Thinks I to myself: 'Well, I didn't know thou were out, mi lad!' and then I wonders what he were up to.

"So I nipped across and looked in at t' window of t' room that he'd entered—I could see in, 'cause t' blind doesn't fit close. And as sure as I'm standin' here it all happened, as he said just now. Theer were t' poor old gentleman lyin' over t' writin' table wi' t' knife stickin' out on him. Mestur Clinton touched him on t' shoulder and looked down at his face, and then he started back like, and then t' manager come in at a back door and collared ho'd on him. And then I made misen scarce, and so I didn't see onny more. But that's t' truth 'at I've telled yer."

Stanford looked at the magistrates.

"I think your worships will agree that this is very remarkable evidence," he said. "There are two questions I should like to put to the witness which relate to two important points. King, you say the blind of the window through which you looked did not fit closely. How much space had you through which you could look?"

"A good couple of inches, sir," answered King.

"What were you standing on when you looked through the window?"

"A flower bed, sir, a sort o' ornamental border."

Stanford turned to the police officials. "Perhaps you will look into both these matters at once?" he said. "I need not show you how important they are. Where are the boots you were wearing last night, King?"

"I'm wearin' 'em now, sir."

"Very well—the police will want to see them. That will do."

But Rowland Parke rose—the great Mr. Miller-Stanford was not to have all his own way. And when Rowland Parke betrayed a tendency to sneer, those who knew that brilliant young gentleman knew that he had something up his sleeve.

"Wait a moment, King," he said as Ginger was about to leave the box. "I want to ask you a question or two. What time did you leave Stelford Gaol yesterday?"

"Same time as I allus do," answered Ginger amid laughter.

"And what time is that, pray?"

"Eight o'clock, o' course."

"What was the first thing you did?"

"Went and had a pint, to be sure—same as you would if you'd gone without for a fortnit," retorted Ginger.

"And what time did you come home?"

"Some time durin' t' forenoon," said Ginger. "I were none particular."

"You'd nothing to do and plenty of money to do it with, I suppose," said Parke, sarcastically. "Now, where did you spend the rest of the day? You may as well tell the truth, because I can easily find out."

"I've no objection to sayin' where I spent t' day," replied Ginger. "I were a piece at home, dressin' misen up and havin' a bit o' dinner, and then I went to t' Flyin' Horse and stopped there all t' afternoon."

"Oh, and where did you go then?"

"Nay, I went up t' street to t' Blue Lion and stopped there till I bethowt misen I'd go up and see if I could get a word wi' t' sarvent lass."

"And, pray, how many pints of ale had you had by that time?" asked Parke with a glance at the bench.

"I'm sure I never kept no count," answered Ginger, cheerfully.

"A good many. I should think," said Parke. "Now, on your oath, were you sober when you went to the castle?"

"Aye, as sober as what you are just now!"

"Why didn't you go at once to tell the police what you'd seen?"

"'Cause I were so upset, Mestur Parke. It made me feel reight bad. I didn't know what to do. So I considered to sleep ower it, and to come here this mornin' and hear what were said."

"Now, I don't want to appear too inquisitive," said Parke, "but isn't it a fact that you have been convicted several times at this court for assault, and for fighting, and disorderly conduct?"

"Well, I know I'm handy wi' mi fists," admitted King.

"And you've also been convicted at least six times for poaching?"

"I'm fond of a bit of sport."

Parke motioned him to leave the box and turned to the bench. "I shall leave it to your worships to say what amount of reliance can be placed upon the evidence of a witness of this sort," he said, "and I again claim that I have demonstrated to you that I am right in asking for a committal. The evidence—"

But the chairman, who had during the last few minutes been engaged in a whispered consultation with his colleagues, interrupted the young solicitor with uplifted finger.

"We have already decided upon an adjournment, Mr. Parke," he said. "It is obvious that a more searching investigation must be made. The evidence of the last witness—and I must say that despite his career as a brawler and a poacher, I see no reason to doubt his word—will have to be thoroughly sifted and tested. The prisoner is remanded for eight days."

It seemed to the sharp-eyed little man from Scotland Yard, who had listened in silence to all that had gone on since his arrival, that he had lighted upon as queer a lot of people as ever he had encountered in the whole of his long professional career.

With the retirement of the magistrates from the bench and the disappearance of the prisoner from the dock, a regular pandemonium broke out all over those parts of the court which had been seized upon by the pitmen. Shouts and cries arose everywhere; groups begun to argue; here and there discussions grew heated, and fists were raised and shaken; it took all the efforts of the local police to get the noisy mob out of doors. While the clearing-out process was going on, Inspector Cortelyou went across the rapidly thinning space in the well of the court and approached Phillipa, who held out her hand to him.

"How do you do, Inspector Cortelyou?" she said. "I recognized you as soon as you came in."

"I am deeply sorry to meet you on such a sad occasion, Miss Mannersley," said the inspector with an old-fashioned and very polite bow. "The only comfort I can offer you is that after what I have heard I sincerely trust I shall be able to establish your cousin's innocence."

"Oh, how thankful, how grateful I shall be if that can be done, inspector!" exclaimed Phillipa. "It is, of course, a monstrous thing that any one could suspect my unfortunate cousin of such a dreadful crime. I have just been saying to Mr. Quinton that any one who really knew Clinton would recognize that it is an impossible thing that he could have so far forgotten himself as to—to have done that. Oh, it is inconceivable—inconceivable!"

The shrewd eyes glanced at Quinton's hard, set face, and the subtle brain behind them guessed something of the manager's secret.

"Well," he said, turning again to Phillipa, "we must keep up heart, Miss Mannersley. I always trust a good deal to first impressions, and my own impression is that the two witnesses I have heard—your cousin, Sir Clinton, and the foxy-haired gentleman—were telling the absolute truth. At any rate, between ourselves—I take it that this gentleman is a friend of the family—I shall not trouble my head further about Sir Clinton in the matter, except by working in a way which will clear him."

Phillipa's eyes filled with tears. She felt as if she could have thrown her arms round the queer little man with the wrinkled face.

"Oh, thank you, thank you a thousand times, Inspector Cortelyou!" she exclaimed. "That gives me so much courage. And you are so clever that I feel sure you will clear things up."

"What line do you propose to follow, inspector?" asked Quinton.

"I propose to look for the real culprit," replied the inspector quietly. "Find him or her or them, or whoever it may be, and the case against Sir Clinton is at an end.

"After I have had an interview with the police here, Miss Mannersley," he continued, turning to Phillipa again, "I shall go up to the castle to make some investigations, and perhaps I may need your help."

Phillipa replied that she would be at his disposal at any time, and as at that moment her footman came in to say that the brougham was waiting for her, she prepared to leave the now nearly empty court, Quinton attending her. Inspector Cortelyou, whose mind was of an extraordinary alertness, suddenly took a bold step.

"Miss Mannersley," he said, "you must forgive me, but all sorts of seemingly irrelevant questions are often very relevant in these affairs. I heard just now, while I was sitting at the solicitors' table there, that there has always been a strong attachment between you and your cousin. You'll pardon me if I ask you if there is any engagement between you, and when it was made?"

Phillipa answered without hesitation. "Yes, Inspector Cortelyou," she said, "we became engaged the night before last."

The inspector bowed, and Phillipa and Quinton went away. And Cortelyou knew then what he had suspected at first, that the strong-faced, resolute-looking manager was in love with the girl—and he also knew that until that moment he had not heard of her promise to her cousin. He fitted on his gloves to a nicety, set his quaint hat on his head at a jaunty angle, and went to join Inspector Illingworth, who was impatiently waiting for him.

Illingworth was in a state of nerves. He was pacing up and down his office when Inspector Cortelyou joined him, obviously at a loss as to something or other.

"You appear to be worried," said the man from Scotland Yard.

"Worried!" exclaimed Illingworth. "I should think so. I wonder who wouldn't be?"

"What is it that's the trouble?"

"The trouble? The colliers are the trouble," replied Illingworth. "Whenever anything of this sort happens they seem to go off their heads—half of 'em 'll never go to work for days now! They'll talk all day and all night about this—argument's meat and drink to them. And they'll cause trouble. In fact, they've already started.

"Some of 'em have half killed Lioney Moore, one of the witnesses, because he spied on Sir Clinton. It's because they're all so in favor of Sir Clinton that I'm afraid. I'm bound to send him to Stelford for the eight days' remand, and the men are quite capable of attempting to rescue him."

"Nonsense!" said Inspector Cortelyou.

"I know what I'm talking about," replied Illingworth.

"Then keep him here till night, and get him off quietly by road," said Inspector Cortelyou. "Well, I'm going up to the castle. I'll see you later in the afternoon."

CHAPTER X.

"I'VE GOT HIM!"

THE two officers whom Illingworth had dispatched to the castle immediately after hearing Ginger King's evidence were on their way back as Inspector Cortelyou made his way there. Ginger, looking very important and triumphant, was with them, having hurried in their wake as soon as Rowland Parke had done with him. Knowing who the little gentleman in the somber garments and the curious hat was, they stopped and saluted him.

"What this man said was quite correct, sir," said one. "The blind doesn't fit by two inches, and you can see all over the room from outside. And the footprints are his; we've compared them carefully."

"Ah, just so," said Inspector Cortelyou. He regarded Ginger King with a grave interest. "I suppose you'd like Sir Clinton to be cleared, my man, wouldn't you?" he asked.

"Why, of course, guv'nor," replied Ginger. "Knowin' as how he's innocent, I nat'rally should."

"Well, then, don't go having too many pints, and don't get into any rows," said the inspector. "The quieter you keep, the

better witness you'll be. And it largely depends on you, my friend."

"All right, guv'nor," said Ginger. "I'll keep straight. I'll go right away to work wi' the next shift and keep out o' mischief."

Inspector Cortelyou nodded and went on his way, and presently came to the castle, whose master lay dead within its darkened rooms. He stood in the grounds for a moment looking about him.

Although almost the whole of his working life had been spent in dealing with crime and criminals, Inspector John Cortelyou had a great eye for beauty, and he loved the romantic and picturesque. He accordingly gazed with great appreciation at the scene before him: at the fine old Norman keep which was still grand and impressive in its slow yielding to decay, at the elms which shut in the garden with its neat beds and smooth lawn, and at the picturesque old house which had been built out of the ruins of the castle.

It struck him with a sad sense of irony and of the mutability of things that the owner of this fine old place should have been struck down so suddenly and have had to leave everything without so much as time to take a last look round in farewell.

"However, that's not attending to business," mused the inspector. "Let's get on to that."

He went up to the front door, rang the bell, and was instantly admitted by Dauncey, who had caught sight of him from an upper window and had hastened down to meet him. The old butler bowed him into the hall.

"I dare say you know who I am, Mr. Dauncey," said the inspector. "I saw you in court, you know."

"Yes, sir—yes, sir," said the old man. "My mistress told me you were coming up, sir. She is very much worn out, inspector, and she has had to go and rest."

"Ah, poor thing, I don't wonder," said the inspector. "I hope she'll sleep—best thing for her just now."

"I was to ask you, inspector, if you would take any refreshment—some lunch, now, or a glass of wine?" said Dauncey. "You have had a long journey, sir."

"Aye, but I lunched on the train, coming down from St. Pancras," replied Inspector Cortelyou. "No, nothing just now, thank 'ee. I might be inclined to join you in a glass in your own room later on, eh? I may have a question or two to ask, d'ye see?"

"With pleasure, sir," replied the butler. "Anything that I can do I shall be glad to do. Then you'd like to see the study at once, inspector?" he continued in a hushed voice. "It's just as it was when the body was removed—nothing's been touched, sir. That was Mr. Illingworth's order, sir—in fact, nobody's been in since last night."

"That's right," said Inspector Cortelyou. "Yes, I'll go there at once, Mr. Dauncey. And don't let me be disturbed by any one, unless it's Mr. Illingworth, while I'm there."

"I'll see to that, sir," said the old man. He led the way through the inner hall and along the wide corridor, which extended the length of the house. "That's the library door, sir," he said, in passing.

"Ah, that's where Mr. Stead was supposed to be at the time the crime was committed, isn't it?" said the inspector. "H-m—I'll have a look at it from the study."

The old butler led him into the study from the corridor, unlocking the door with a key which he took from his pocket and then handed over to the detective.

"Everything's as it was, sir," he whispered. "I'll go now. You can lock yourself in if you like."

"Where shall I find you if I want you?" asked Inspector Cortelyou.

"If I am not down the hall, sir, one of the footmen will fetch me," answered Dauncey.

Left to himself, and having locked the door, the detective's first proceeding was to draw up all the blinds and flood the room with the afternoon sunlight. He turned from the big bow window and looked around him.

There was nothing disorderly in the appearance of the room; every article of furniture seemed to be in its proper place; there were no signs of any fierce struggle; nothing to show at first sight that a par-

ticularly foul and cowardly murder had taken place there not twenty hours before. But on the loose papers on the desk were certain dark stains which Inspector Cortelyou knew to be the victim's blood; there were more stains on the desk itself, and one on the carpet beneath.

He approached the desk, and, bending over it, looked at the papers thus stained, which he supposed to be the last things that had engaged the dead man's attention. They seemed to be documents relating to the colliery — abstracts, reports, balance sheets, letters, and, so far as the detective could see without touching them, they were all of an ordinary business character.

Across the blotting pad in the center of the desk lay a pen—he supposed it to have fallen from the dead man's hand as the fatal blow was struck. However, he saw no signs to show that Sir Robert had been writing at the moment.

Turning away from the desk, Inspector Cortelyou began to examine the room, not in any exhaustive fashion, but by strolling here and there about it. It was a large apartment, entirely paneled in black oak, and contained so many articles of furniture in the way of writing and reading tables, stands, chests, and other impediments of like nature, that there was not much room to move about in it.

Low bookcases of black oak were arranged against the paneling; here and there in the panels hung etchings and old steel plates. And, with his hands in his pockets and apparently doing nothing more than examining these pictures, Inspector Cortelyou began to walk round the room, in reality keeping a sharp eye on the walls. And in one corner he suddenly paused, seeing that at some time or other a door, low and narrow, had been cut through the paneling.

This was on one of the two outer walls of the room—the same wall in which stood the door that opened on the garden.

"This," said Inspector Cortelyou to himself—"this must be a cupboard"; and he tried to open the door by pulling at the beading of the panels. The door, however, remained fixed. He beat upon it with his hand; it sounded very hollow within—much more hollow than a cupboard would have done. And a sudden idea occurring to him, he unlocked the garden door, and, stepping on to the path, glanced along the side of the house.

"Just what I thought!" he exclaimed. "I was sure of it."

Built out from the line of the study wall, and projecting in a semicircle until it terminated at the wall of another wing of the house, was a building of two stories in height, which doubtless added to the architectural effect, but did not, so far as Inspector Cortelyou could see, possess any utilitarian feature. He made a rough calculation, by pacing, of how far it was from the garden door to the angle of the building. Returning to the study, he paced the distance to the door in the paneling.

"Also just as I thought," he said. "That door leads into the building at the angle. I'll lay a pound to a penny it's a stairway."

Letting himself out into the corridor, he went in search of Dauncey, and, finding him, at once led him back to the study. He pointed out the door in the paneling.

"Look here, Mr. Dauncey," he said. "What's that? A cupboard?"

The old man shook his head. "No, sir, no!" he said. "Dear me, now, to think of you seeing that, inspector! You must have sharp eyes. No, sir—it was a fad of my poor dear master's, was that, and one of which he soon tired."

"Aye; but what is it?" asked the inspector.

"It's a stairway, sir, to the great gallery above," replied Dauncey. "He was a very romantic man, sir, was the late Sir Robert, and a good many years ago he made some alterations in the house, and this was one of them.

"You'll have noticed, inspector, that in this house there's a hall which runs right through from one end to the other. Well, sir, it's the same upstairs—there's a gallery which does the same thing. That's where all the best and finest pictures are kept. Now, Sir Robert's bedroom opens off that gallery, and when he was making the alterations I spoke of he had two stairways made in the walls—these walls are six feet

thick, inspector—one to the study and one to the library, so that if he wanted books or papers in the night he could come straight down for them from his room without the trouble of having to go all round by the great staircase.

"But, as a matter of fact, he scarcely ever used them, for they hadn't been made very long when he fell down one and put his ankle out, and he bumped his forehead very badly in coming down the other. After that he said they were too steep and too narrow, and that he'd been an old ass for having them made; and, to tell you the truth, sir, I don't think he ever used them again."

"All the same, they're both there," said Inspector Cortelyou.

"Oh, they're both there, inspector," answered the butler. "Would you like to look into this one, sir?"

"It's locked," said the detective. "I've tried it."

"No, it's not locked, sir," said Dauncey. "There isn't a lock; it's a spring. See—this is it. You press your finger there."

He pressed a projecting portion of the paneling, and the door flew open. Inspector Cortelyou saw a very narrow stairway of dark wood, going steeply up in the wall.

"Like to go up it, sir?" asked Dauncey. "If so, I'll go up first and open the top door. There's plenty of light from the gallery."

"Not just now, thank 'ee," said Inspector Cortelyou. "Show me the similar stair in the library, will you?"

"With pleasure, inspector," replied the butler. "But if you don't mind, sir, we'll go round by the corridor. I—the fact is, I can't a-bear to pass my poor master's desk, sir. It gives me the creeps."

"Ah, I don't wonder," said the detective. "It's very natural."

Dauncey led the way round to the library, and pointed out the companion stairway. Then, at Inspector Cortelyou's request, he took him up the great staircase in the inner hall and showed him the stairway doors in the gallery.

"They all open in the same way," remarked the butler, demonstrating the secret of the panel in each case. "Like to go down, now that you can see?"

"No," answered the inspector. "Shut them up again. Now, look here, have you got such a thing as a particularly strong lamp in the house—a very strong one?"

Dauncey could not think of anything at first, but suddenly remembered having heard Fisher, the footman, talking in the servants' hall recently of a very powerful bicycle lamp which he had just bought. And he took Inspector Cortelyou down again, and sent for Fisher and the lamp, and had its capabilities demonstrated.

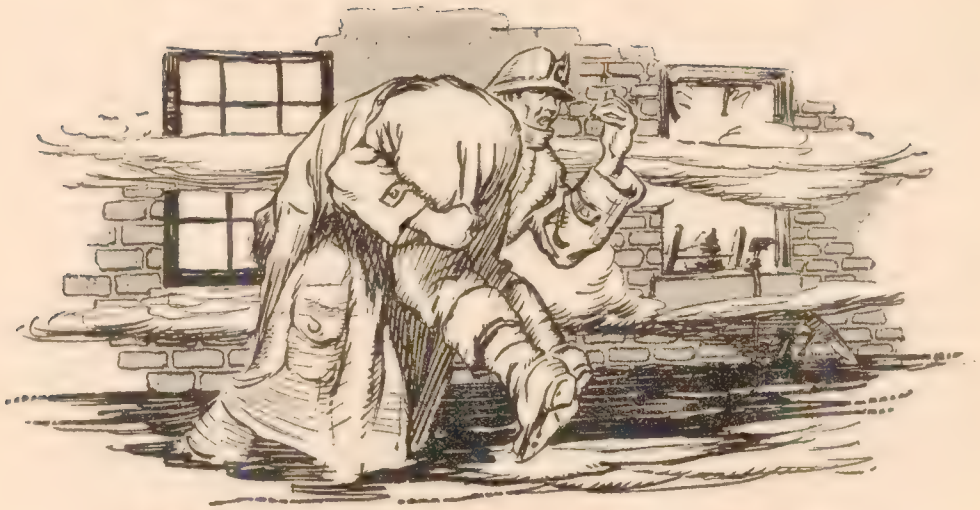
"And now don't let anybody disturb me on any account," said the detective, possessing himself of the lamp, "and don't allow those stairway doors to be opened, Mr. Dauncey. I want to examine those two places carefully."

Then he went back to the study and locked himself in again, and, coming through to the library, he also locked the door of that apartment. And then, with the aid of the acetylene lamp, he began an examination of the staircases set in the walls—and he began with that in the library first.

If any one had been there to watch him, Inspector Cortelyou's thoroughness and patience would have seemed as wearisome as it was amazing. Hour after hour went by, and found him going over every inch of the doors and the walls of the staircases. The walls were of smooth, highly polished wood; the doors were paneled. He paid the most scrupulous attention to the projections in the paneling which contained the secret springs by which the doors opened, peering at them and about them through a pair of special glasses which he had produced from his pocket with as much anxiety as if he expected them to speak. And it was already growing toward dusk when he at last shut off the lamp in the quiet study, put his glasses in their case with a decisive snap, and knew that his labor had been successful.

"I've got him! I've got him!" he said triumphantly. "And I'll hang him, as sure as my name's John Cortelyou!"

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.



3-11-125

By KARL W. DETZER

ENGINE 27 is a poor post at best. Old firemen shun it. Men with friends in high places in the City Hall avoid it. Even the recruits know that they should hope against assignment to it.

For it is written in the thumbed books of the department that of all the companies this one each year pays heaviest homage to the Fire God. Captains, lieutenants, pipemen and engineers, singly or by twos and threes, die fighting on old 27.

But there is no mystery in this black record, no man is held to blame. It is because Engine 27 sits waiting for duty deep in the heart of the old industrial district. Ancient, decrepit buildings hem it in; narrow streets enmesh it, by day a-roar with the clatter of hoofs and the rattle of iron tires, and by night deep, black cañons of silence and mistrust.

Often these streets are awakened from soundless sleep by the wailing siren of Engine 27. Often they have echoed the voice of old Captain Mason urging his men into some smoke-belching sub-cellar, or calling them over rickety rafters, while red arms thrust through the skylights and flare out into the dark.

It was the morning after the fire in the doll factory, when Dorsey, young, hard-hitting, fearless Dorsey, had clung to the wall until it was too late.

The men of Engine 27, as they gripped an ornamental coping, had felt the snap of a roof breaking in the middle, and a sway of the wall in warning. Old Captain Mason had given a sharp command, and the crowd watching in the street had cheered the helmeted men who slid to safety along the life-rope.

But Dorsey had remained—another minute. Then there came a thundering rain of brick and stone, a great flash in the sky, and rescuers, after digging, had reported in hushed voices that Pipeman Dorsey was buried deep.

Captain Mason was thinking of all this as he put down the newspaper he had read a score of times since daybreak and glanced at the youth who stood before him.

"Burke's my name—Timothy Burke—reporting for duty, sir, in place of Pipeman Dorsey."

Captain Mason surveyed the new man appraisingly. Tall, slender as a sapling, standing with his feet apart in the careless grace of youth, Burke looked straight into the old man's eyes. He carried a burlap sack lightly across one shoulder, his high, loose boots—bunkers, the firemen call them—strapped over the other.

"Burke, eh?" Captain Mason spoke slowly. "Are you ready, lad?"

"I am, sir."

"Then go upstairs, and take cot No. 5. It was Dorsey's bunk. When you've fixed things up come down and I'll make you acquainted with the boys."

Burke nodded and trudged up the stairway. And Captain Mason turned to the desk, to make entry on the company log of the successor to Pipeman Dorsey. He held the pen many minutes after he had blotted the line and stared at the blank wall.

A recruit, this Burke, that was written plain upon his face, young, careless, with sleepy eyes. Why did they always send boys to Engine 27? It was a man's job, and whom did he have? Hennisey, Collins, McCreery, Schwartz, all young lads, light-headed and clumsy.

And now Burke, younger than the rest, with sleepy eyes in the bargain. But a boy was better than no one; with brave, steady Dorsey gone, he needed hands. Burke would do; he must do.

Above in the squad room Burke whistled guardedly as he tucked his blankets into the foot of the cot and arranged his little store of odds and ends on the shelf at its head. He had been alone at first, but after a few minutes he turned, aware of another man in the room.

A short, broad-shouldered chap, with flushed face and yellow eyebrows, smiled at him and approached.

"You the new one?" The short man pushed forward his right hand.

"Yes, I just come. Burke's my name."

"I'm Hennisey, called Spike."

"My first name's Timothy."

"Tim, is it? Good name. Where you come from?"

"From drill school. I was a recruit till this morning; this is my first assignment."

The man called Spike whistled softly.

"It's a good one," he replied after a minute. "Here's where you'll learn the fire business."

"So I've heard." Burke had finished the bed and sat down on the edge of it. "I've heard that this was a hard outfit. What's wrong with it?"

"It's got what the old lady died of, like they say—complications," Hennisey answered lightly. "First, it's a bad district, ratty old shacks and high insurance. Second, but not least, there's the old man."

"What's the matter with him?"

"Nothing the matter with him as he can help. He was just born too long ago."

"Cranky?" Burke sensed unpleasantness.

"Not him, quiet and easy going as a preacher round the house here, don't smoke or play cards or cuss or holler, but at a fire—well, he believes we're being paid to work at a fire, and he likes to earn his pay."

"A driver, is he?" Burke had heard of driving captains at the drill school.

"No, he don't drive, but he leads mighty fast. My advice to you, if you'll pardon it, boy, is to go just as far as you got to, and no farther. You got to go far enough with this old man. He ain't happy unless the whole company's up to its neck in fire and eating smoke by the bushel."

"Well, I saw him when I come in, and he don't look bad—just kind of old."

"That's it." Hennisey warmed to his subject. "He's been twenty-five years in this business and he takes it too serious. Can't drive fast enough for him, can't get high enough on a roof, or deep enough in a cellar, and where there's most smoke, there's old 27."

"I think I'll like smoke," Burke said, grinning, as he slid after Hennisey down the brass pole to the apparatus room, "that's why I joined the fire department."

II.

It was the second night of Burke's service with Engine 27, and Hennisey sat on watch. Burke had dragged a chair forward

from the card table and did duty with him. A single dull electric light sent dim radiance over the massive car quietly waiting in the gloom at the rear.

Before the men, on its polished oak board, the intricate mechanism of the alarm system sputtered and ticked intermittently, tapping out its message on the little white paper ribbon.

"You understand 'em?" Hennisey motioned toward the shining plates and black rubber buttons under their glass case.

Burke nodded. Yet through the nod flickered a waver of uncertainty. Hennisey tapped the ashes out of his pipe against his broad heel, fondled the bowl, and slipped it into his pocket.

"That there alarm that just come in," he volunteered, "was what we call a 'still' in this business. Some place right now there's a fellow jumping up and down and wondering if the fire department's got his address right. He found something on fire, and telephoned to headquarters.

"Then headquarters put that alarm on the joker—which is what some funny fellow years ago named the tapper. You just heard the alarm come in—remember, five taps repeated three times? After that comes the number of the company. Then the company picks up the telephone receiver, and headquarters gives 'em the location."

"What was that come in just now?" Burke looked at the instruments with a gleam in his sleepy eye.

"That was Engine 113 going out. They're six miles south; we don't worry about them. If the fire's too big for them to handle alone, they pull a box—it comes in on the tape over here."

Hennisey picked up the ribbon of paper with its scattering row of punches. "After that," he went on, "if the next three companies can't handle it they pull a 'two-eleven.' See—the tape punches the number of the box, and then two punches and then eleven.

"Next, if it's got away, they pull a three-eleven, and then everybody in the business puts on his pants and comes down the pole to wait for orders."

"How many of those third alarms do you get—do we get?" The recruit corrected himself.

Hennisey closed his eyes, scratched his shaggy, yellow hair with a blunt forefinger and reflected.

"We ain't been out on one for about three weeks," he finally concluded. "That was only a two-eleven when Dorsey was killed. But I guess as a run we get one about every week."

Silence settled upon Engine 27. Burke sat back, his chair tilted against the wall, his feet swinging.

Hennisey glanced at the clock, wondering at its slow crawl toward midnight when he should be relieved. He picked up a newspaper, glanced at it, and put it down. Then he, too, tipped back in his chair and his head dropped upon his breast.

Even in his short career in what he termed the "fire business," Hennisey had learned the secret of the dogwatch sleep. It is real slumber, not a half wakeful, half sleeping state, but a deep, full repose, strung upon dead silence.

A slight vibration of sound—and it is shattered. Each time the joker taps its message, the man on watch awakens, listens, and if the order is not for him, then slips to sleep again.

Burke wondered as he stared straight in front of him, wide-eyed, sleepless, if he would ever rest like that. Perhaps.

At least he was a real fireman now—three nights ago he had slept at the drill school, safe, secure from rattling bells. To-night he was a guardian of life; to-night women and children slept peacefully because he guarded them.

The little joker rested. Upstairs the sleepers had become still. Far trolley cars rumbled like echoes of dreams; a light wind sighed about the corners of the house; the clock ticked stealthily.

Burke's mind buzzed with jostling thoughts. Memories came trooping out of the past, were rudely tripped, scattered by galloping impressions, by darting glances into the future.

There was the captain. Twenty-five years in the fire department—the things he had seen, the moments he had lived! He was old now. Didn't he tire of it all, of the

uncertainty, of the dull, dead hours of monotony, of the crashing moments of fight and adventure? Burke wondered.

And the little girl—the old man talked of nothing else while they sat at supper behind the big engine. There must be two captains—the fireman, and this little girl's father. Burke was surprised at the strain of pity that had crept into his thoughts.

Hennisey stirred and glanced up.

"Better turn in—try to get a holt on some sleep," he suggested.

"Not sleepy," Burke answered mechanically. His mind was still on the captain.

"Maybe you will be, though. You might have to work before morning. If this here joker starts laughing to the tune of Engine 27 you'll wish you had grabbed off a wink."

"I couldn't sleep," Burke answered; "I've got so much to think about."

"You'll never make a fireman then, lad. Better get a job on the front end of a street car."

"I was thinking of Captain Mason," Burke went on; "he's such a queer guy."

"Say!" Hennisey leaned forward. "If you want a nice, pleasant job scrubbing down the sidewalk about six o'clock in the morning, you just let the old man hear you calling him a guy, queer or otherwise!"

"He's been pretty easy so far." Burke hesitated.

"And so far, remember, we ain't turned a wheel! Wait till you join forces with him in a active sector. He'd make a monkey holler for help going up a ladder. He eats hot cinders smothered in smoke for breakfast, and he'll expect you to eat 'longside of him, and like it, too."

"I was thinking of his little girl," Burke went on disjointedly, "the one he talked about at supper. Seems to me the mother—"

"Mother's dead," Hennisey interrupted. "I reckon she went off of fright some night, seeing her old man tear loose at a fire." He tipped back in his chair and closed his eyes.

"But take this from a bird that knows him," he went on after a silent minute; "the old man is the best man in the company, bar none, and he always will be."

Burke twisted with resentment. A queer one, this Hennisey, one minute he berated the captain for smoke-eating, the next he announced, positively, no other man on Engine 27 could ever equal him. Still—the captain was an old man.

Burke looked down at his own long, lithe body. There would be a time. He would await it.

III.

And just at that moment the joker, a long time silent, awakened with a burst of chatter.

Three rapid fives, it sputtered; then four more, then two. Hennisey lifted the receiver from its hook and listened.

"No. 42," he announced, "going to Wells and Oxford. We go on the third alarm. Bad corner—three old factories and a paper warehouse, a million high voltage wires running through the alley, and all the shacks tall, with narrow airshafts."

"We go on the third alarm!" The words tingled through Burke's mind, awakening sharp, clear pictures. They were as short as they were vivid, these visions, like scenes and landscapes and faces bursting out of a rainy night on a flash of lightning. He saw revolving red wheels, hose throbbing in his own hands, the thin legs and crooked back of the old gray captain on a ladder.

"We go on the third alarm." Burke looked ahead twenty-five years. He wondered if he would be sleeping in an engine house in another quarter of a century, if he would be old and bent and gray, ready to go on the third alarm? He wondered if a red-faced youth, twenty-five years from now, would refer to him as the best man in the company—bar none.

The little instrument on the oak board coughed, and the ribbon of white paper unwound and moved down toward the floor. A diminutive bell rattled, making much of the silence. And on the ribbon scattered punches told of an alarm at box 125, Wells and Oxford Streets.

"Hello, there!" Pipeman Hennisey, fully awake, fondled the tape in his heavy fingers. "Whatever was there got away from Engine 42. See, they pulled that box, calling four more engines."

"And we go there on the third?" Burke asked.

Once more the tape ran out of the glass box and across the edge of the board. "One—two—five," the punches registered, "one—two—five, two—eleven, one—two—five."

"That's the second," Hennisey announced, still exasperatingly calm. Burke attempted to sit still. He tugged at his feet to keep them off the floor. He assumed nonchalance, disinterest, annoyance.

But Hennisey understood. Hennisey had been a recruit six months earlier.

"*Bang!*" went the little bell. "*Bang, bang!*" Again the ribbon moved to the sputtering of electric sparks. The third alarm tapped through its dismal recitation. "One—two—five, one—two—five, three—eleven, one—two—five."

Hennisey, calm Hennisey of the moment before, leaped to a switch on the wall. As he shot it home, lights flashed in the four corners of the room. The great engine flared out in the dark, the electric globes reflected in its nickle.

Hennisey stabbed a push button with his stubby forefinger. A bell, a great, harsh-voiced gong somewhere above, smashed through the silence of the sleeping room.

Burke stood, fascinated, motionless. Men, half clad, slid rapidly down the brass pole and ran, tugging at their breeches.

Burke saw old Captain Mason slip a bent shoulder under a sagging white suspender. His heavy boots beat a dull tattoo upon the floor. He had climbed to his seat beside the driver.

"Burke, here!" Hennisey's voice sounded from the rear step. Timothy Burke leaped to his place on the back of the truck.

He saw Collins, the driver, straighten out behind the wheel; he saw Captain Mason jerk at a cord that swung open the doors; he heard the gong warn passers-by.

The floor slid out from under the engine, and Burke clung to the brass elbow rail. He was on his way! A third alarm, and he—Timothy Burke—was racing to battle!

"Gloves," Hennisey shouted. "Put 'em on, and the helmet. Button your rubber jacket at the neck, you'll be getting heat and water pretty quick."

All the world had dissolved into a clangor. Somewhere a bell rattled, somewhere a siren wailed, and the motor roared like a battle plane. The great truck was mad with speed.

Burke held with elbows and feet and hands, and still the racing engine seemed determined to fling him away, to leave him suspended in the air. Now it careened around a corner without slackening its pace, and Hennisey, reaching back, gripped the younger fireman by the shoulder.

The sky ahead showed a deep purple, broken by flashes of violet and orange. Far behind the lights of another truck glared through the darkened street. Somewhere off to the left another siren squealed. Shadows of men and boys running flitted past upon the sidewalk and were left behind.

Then the brakes jammed tight.

"Here with that suction!" Burke heard Captain Mason. He saw Hennisey tugging at the heavy rubber pipe. He ran around to the side of the machine and lifted one end of the great tube upon his shoulder.

"Over here! No, down—that's it." The captain's voice was again smooth and quiet, in odd contrast to Burke's pounding ears. It flashed through his mind that the old man was calm, even in the midst of turmoil.

Everywhere men shouted, glass tumbled in sounding showers, engines purred, and far away, coming nearer and nearer, other sirens screamed and bells jangled. Broken, uneven noises they were, tuned to a rampant, satanic symphony.

"Engine 27 reports, sir." Captain Mason had approached a giant in a long white coat and an ornate helmet.

"Lead down the alley—into the cellar behind—you'll find windows there. Fire's in the center, on all floors, followed the elevator shaft."

The big man gave his orders hurriedly. Then he backed into a swirl of smoke.

"Lead out, five lengths is enough." Captain Mason addressed Hennisey. "Lead around in back and stand by. Here, lad"—he turned to Burke—"give me a hand with the line—that's it. Pull. More, a little more. Good! All right, Collins, connect her up. Come, son, let's go."

Burke followed his captain toward the tall, black building with its crown of pounding flame. Below in the street men hurried

in a somber, crimson glare; red smoke curled about the corners, and long, white columns of water angled from the street to roof, where they, too, turned pink and purple and orange in a shifting wind.

"Get a holt of the line," the captain ordered, "about twenty feet back, that's it—pull, this way, down here."

The black mouth of the little narrow alley billowed acid smoke. Straight into it plunged the captain, and Burke could feel the hose line moving forward as the old man pushed ahead.

"You, Truck 10, smash in them windows in the cellar, Engine 27 is going in. Ventilate, that's the way, smash them, ventilate all along the row." It was the giant fire marshal speaking, somewhere ahead in the smoke. Men hurried past Burke, one with a lantern which haloed him and showed bright on the ax in his other hand.

The hose at which Burke tugged went slack and he stumbled in the darkness. There were other men here. It was black, now that the lantern had passed, but he knew that the men of Engine 27 must be massing for their attack.

"This one looks good." It was Collins speaking. "Smash it!!"

Glass tinkled and there was a ripping of wood, and Burke felt a hot draft upon his face. Smoke struck him across the eyes, and, winking, he closed them.

"Are you here?" Captain Mason counted his men. "Hennisey, Collins, McCreery, Burke. Good. You, McCreery, run and tell Schwartz to charge the line—we need water."

IV.

WHEN the captain next spoke he seemed far away. For a moment Burke was confused. Then he realized that the old man had slipped through the window into the basement. He was calling upon his men to follow. The recruit felt his way along the hot wall with one hand, with the other he gripped the heavy hose.

He found the sill of the window, the ragged edges of the frame, and followed the hose line, down, down, down. He allowed his fingers to relax upon the sill, and dropped.

Hot, blistering water stood ankle-deep upon the cellar floor. Smoke, a heavy insufferable blanket, wrapped itself about his head. It caught him at the throat, and gripped with fierce fingers; it struck him across the eyes, and he staggered.

"Down, men, it ain't so bad close to the floor—pretty good," Captain Mason directed, and Burke dropped to his knees in the scalding water.

He ran his hand along the hose, now taut with pent-up power. As he did so he touched another hand, dry and thin, and he knew the old man knelt there in the smoke and water, only a foot from him.

"Hold her!" the captain ordered, and in the moment the roar of a stream sounded in Burke's ears. The great hose line trembled and kicked and throbbed under his hands, and he held it to his breast and closed his eyes. Acid smoke again gripped his throat like iron fingers and wrung his breath from him.

Scalding water nipped at his legs and knees. He lost sense of direction. He only knew that somewhere ahead there was fire, that the old captain knelt at his right, that Hennisey squatted just behind him, that Collins was behind somewhere.

Now a crack in the opposite wall showed red, and then another and another. Little flames crept through and licked across the ceiling. The low cellar room lightened with a heavy pink illumination. Burke blinked the tears from his eyes and looked sidewise toward the captain.

The old man crouched deep in the water, with the brass nozzle in his hands and his pinched face close beside the stream of white water. He swayed to the left and right, directing the heavy column first upon one spot, then upon another. His old body trembled with the vibration of the hose and he swung like some mad sorcerer at incantations.

Slowly the fire crept closer; slowly the tiny room became insufferable. Now much of the ceiling glowed with flame. The wall at the other end seemed ready to crumble.

Speechless, the four men on the floor held their ground while the white water pounded back and forth in a losing battle.

Burke felt the sting of the flame upon his

cheeks. He became giddy, light-headed; he propped his elbow against his knee and shielded his face with his free arm. This was madness, he thought; even now it must be too late to get out; they must stick here and fight—fight it out.

Some one coughed close behind him and a voice sounded. Burke turned his head slightly and saw a man crawling toward the window.

"It's Collins, cap," he heard Hennisey shout; "he's got enough. Let's back up a bit, cap."

"Not yet," the old man roared back an answer. Burke felt his knees crumple and his head sag forward.

"How are you, lad?" Burke realized the captain's shout, directed toward him, was kindly.

"Me, I'm all right," he heard his own voice answer and was surprised.

"Up a little, then," the other called, "about two yards and I think we can knock it here—this is the base, and they's lots of water coming down from on top."

Mechanically, Burke lunged forward and the hose slipped after him. He thought he heard another voice, and in a moment when he had turned, Hennisey had gone. They were alone, he and the old captain. He must stick, he mustn't turn!

Young Collins and Hennisey had gone back, and the old man refused to turn. Burke's hazy mind turned back to Hennisey's statement earlier that night—how many hours and miles away it seemed—that the captain was the best man in the company, bar none.

Here was a test. Perhaps he was. He was a brave old man, Burke was sure of that.

And then his smoke-clouded mind wandered again and he forgot the fire and the heat for a minute; he forgot the savage fighter crouched beside him on the floor. He saw a kindly old man, proud of a little girl.

A voice interrupted his vague, straying thoughts and called him back to the cellar inferno, to the old captain and the creeping flame and the danger.

"We're knocking it, lad, see?"

Burke opened his eyes and realized dimly that the fire was in retreat. The ceiling was black again now, and the flame was confined to the other end of the room. But the smoke still poured, thicker and heavier than before.

"See that door?" the captain, leaning backward, called into his ear. "Drag over there. Heave, lad, steady!"

Burke crawled upon his knees with one hand deep in the scalding water, the hose line held tight against him. Out of the smoke in the dull red light the uncertain shape of the captain loomed just ahead of him. They were at the door.

Captain Mason fumbled with the latch. The hinges creaked. For a moment only darkness faced them, and then a little light and a great, blistering draft. Burke saw the old man sink forward. Then he arose, and pointed one finger into the dim chamber.

There on the floor, huddled in a heap in water, lay a man.

Captain Mason plunged into the room, whirled about and dropped the kicking hose line. A new draft fanned the blaze to fresh ferocity.

Suddenly the room flared clear and Burke saw Captain Mason groping on his knees in the water. He tumbled, and lifted, and fell again. The light showed the blistered face of the other man, a white palm thrown across his eyes, and the flames creeping nearer and nearer.

Burke tried to shout, but the sounds choked in his throat. His eyes closed.

And again he heard Hennisey's words, taunting in the terror of the cellar: "The best man in his company, bar none."

Burke dropped to his knees and crawled forward. He found the captain's arm, and lifted it about his shoulder. He looked at the other man upon the floor and wondered, dimly, if the fellow still lived.

Burke turned from the inner room. There was the window, somewhere, and beyond it air.

The window must be here—somewhere. His eyes smarted as he searched the smoke. But there it was, an oblong of light above him. He balanced himself and held his breath. His head seemed loosed from his shoulders as he lunged the quiet body upward and dropped it outside, to safety.

He turned back, wondering dimly if he were mad, wondering why he turned. There was no reason; he should be in the alley; or was there a reason?

There was that door. The flames came closer now; the smoke poured thicker.

With his hands in front of his face, he stumbled into the inner room. He straightened up and stared into its dim obscurity.

Oh, yes. There was that fellow on the floor—the fellow with the white palm across his eyes.

He was heavy, this fellow, a big man. Burke staggered. He dragged the unconscious body toward the window, planted his feet apart and lifted a weight upward.

What was this on his back? Burke could not remember. He only knew that he wanted to be outside and that this thing had to be put out first.

There, it was out.

Now he climbed, and the cool, damp hose, dropping through the window, was fresh against his cheek as he touched it. The flame hurried after him, greedily. He was outside. How cool it was!

But he must get help. The captain must be carried. Which way was the street? Confused, he stood still, and he found himself repeating in a whispered singsong: "Best man in his company, bar none; "best man in his company."

V.

"FIRE of unknown origin destroyed the Whipple warehouses at Wells and Oxford Streets early to-day, at a loss of two hundred thousand dollars. Captain Thomas Mason, veteran commander of Engine 27, rescued A. Harmon, a night watchman, and Timothy Burke, a recruit fireman, from the basement, and was himself overcome by smoke. The three were found unconscious in an areaway shortly before the walls collapsed. All will recover. As a reward for his bravery Captain Mason will be granted the annual one-thousand-dollar prize and a gold medal, and will be retired from active service, fire department officials announced to-day."

The hospital nurse put down the morning newspaper from which she had been reading aloud. Burke lay back upon his pillow and stroked the bandage across his eyes.

The sights and sounds of the night, rushing back, crowded his weary memory. The man on the floor, the captain crumpled in the water, the lash of heat against his cheek, his baked throat, the roar of the flame, the cool dampness of the hose, all flashed back into his mind.

His head was clear now. He remembered it all. It was he who rescued the captain. And yet, the paper—

"Captain Mason is in the next ward," the nurse interrupted. "His little girl was in a few moments ago to say good morning. He doesn't remember much. He hopes that you can tell him."

Timothy Burke hesitated.

"That's how it happened," he finally answered the nurse, "they way the paper tells it—a fine old man, the captain."

AFTER TWENTY YEARS

JUST beyond
The red water tank,
A muddy pond;
On its slippery bank,
One toe in the water, a small naked boy—
What a strange, trifling thing to remember with joy!

An old brick school,
A pig-tailed mate,
Her white foot-rule,
Her felt-edged slate—
What a trumpery picture to hold through the years!
What a warm, silly keepsake to threaten my tears!

Allen Crafton.

Secret of Powder Basin*

By EMERSON HOUGH

Author of "The Covered Wagon," "54-40 or Fight," "The Magnificent Adventure," etc.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE VOW OF ANNIE.

ANNIE BALLANTYNE drove the boat straight on. It was five miles across the lake to the ranch of the Thompson boys. There she expected to find Ed Stanley. In fact, he was at the landing to meet her, for long since he had recognized the sound of the only motor on the lake.

"What are you doing down here, Miss Annie?" he asked, as she drove in at the landing. "What's wrong?"

"Haven't you heard the shooting down below? They've been shooting into the sheep—the Sanders sheep are down in there. I'm afraid Mr. Powers is in trouble."

"Well, suppose he is? That ain't your trouble, is it?"

"Why isn't it? Aren't we neighbors?"

Briefly she described the visit of the two strangers at her lunch room. Stanley stood thoughtful.

"If Dick Washburn is working for Sanders, why, Powers and the Thompson boys are liable to get cleaned out," he declared. "That fellow's a killer. There's ten thousand on his head now. You've been feeding one of the most dangerous men there is in these hills, Miss Annie."

Unnerved by her excitement, the girl sank down on the boat seat, her face in her hands. She began to sob. Stanley stepped toward her, half leg deep in the water.

"I told you how things was, Annie," he began suddenly. ."I told you all along how it was out here—that 'twasn't no place for a woman to live. You can't tell when the old ways is going to break through again in

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this country, and she's always been a bad one out here—plumb bad."

He made a half step farther, his hand on the boat rail. She turned away, sensing the impending situation.

"Annie," he went on hurriedly, "why can't you think things over? Things can't run on this way. This is no country for a girl to be alone in, if things start wrong."

"You said you weren't going to leave us, Ed."

"Shore, I have stayed so far, but how can I? I'm past forty years old. That ain't too old for a man to go crazy about a girl, nor want to take care of her."

She was sobbing, her face turned away. He stood silent for some time.

"Some one has got to take care of you before long, Annie," he repeated. "I don't know as I ought to, but I want to."

"Ed—oh, Ed!" she exclaimed, turning her wet eyes toward him; "I wish it wasn't this way. I'm not going to marry anybody! I've got to be the head of that family. There's Amos to bring up and get to school, and uncle to take care of. And there's Aunt Jennie—it's mostly on account of her."

"You'd lay up money if you'd take an ax to your Aunt Jennie!" exclaimed Stanley in sudden wrath. "You, the only woman in this valley, and the finest in the world."

"Come!" She motioned him to get into the boat, and, wet as he was, he did so, picking up the oars.

Something yearning, maternal filled the heart of Annie with sympathy for this simple and faithful man. As they neared home she broke the silence.

"Ed," said she, "I understand. Forgive me, for I like you so much. Don't it make things any better if I tell you I've given my word not to marry any man at all?"

Ed Stanley made no reply.

CHAPTER XVII.

CONTACT.

THE rifleman who had struck the fence post six inches from Sanders's face could just as easily have sent the bullet through his head, and Sanders knew that. The men on the hill meant to hold this fence. It was to be war.

Two of his own men hurried up across the space now left free by the stampeding sheep, but two puffs of dust arose between them and the fence, and two disfigured bullets whined forebodingly forward. The entire Sanders outfit pulled up standing.

They saw some sort of struggle going on among the four men on the hill beyond the stream. One figure sprang apart from the others, rifle in hand. Now came the reports of his weapon, flatter and duller than that of the high-power rifles which just had spoken so accurately. Close at hand came the muffled thud of bullets striking flesh.

The sheep in terror began a stampede which could not be held by any work of men or dogs. As they swept away, they left a half dozen dead or crippled, and a score of trampled lambs also lay in the dust. And relentlessly there came the *phut-phut* of one bullet after another into the packed mass.

In truth it was Battersleigh and his ancient forty-four that must be held responsible for this work. The others had tried to stop him.

Sanders started on a half run toward the buckboard, where his plunging team was held together by his driver. There was a carbine in the scabbard swung at the end of the seat, but he did not reach it. As he ran across the open space three dust puffs rose between him and what he sought. There came three more, almost in unison; and that was enough.

He knew what that high-power barrage meant. Those men could kill him any time they liked. He pulled up, and threw his hand above his head, holding a white handkerchief.

"Follow them down!" he called out to his men. "Round them up the best you can down below."

He joined the swirling clouds of dust that swept down the flat. The dogs were doing their best to turn in the edges of the frightened sheep band, while footmen and riders spread out and used every effort to get the animals again under control. Sanders, with practiced eye, was estimating his losses. Continual profanity fell from

his lips, and for once his losses seemed no dearer than the revenge he planned. He wondered why Dick Washburn did not come. He held that man's life in the hollow of his hand, and now he needed him badly.

But now in the opposite direction, three miles down the flat below the point where the men were trying to hold the sheep band, Sanders saw a dust cloud which he could not understand. At that point below, the sagebrush flat was broken by a wide belt of jackpine forest.

Over the tops of the trees, still under cover, there came steadily forward a vast dust cloud which might have been raised by an army. Sixty years ago that would have meant a big pack train or a body of troops. But what could it mean to-day? The day of mines and Indians was gone.

Sanders could not guess what the heavy dust cloud meant. He could wait no longer. He drove down the flat to see what he could learn.

"What the hell!" he exclaimed to his driver at length. "That's a wagon train. What are those freighters doing up here?" He counted thirty heavy wagons as they emerged, one after the other, from the cover of the last fringe of woods, four horses to the wagon, and each with a heavy load. But what were they carrying? Where were they going, and from what country did they come?

Sanders knew every enterprise of the State, but no one had told him about the invasion of a wagon train northbound, where there was not a mining prospect within a hundred miles.

He rode down to meet the head of the column. A hoarsely songful, blissfully intoxicated, absolutely profane and wholly insouciant man grinned at him from the high wagon seat with no concern as to who or what he was.

Sanders got his buckboard off the road. Occasionally a man greeted him. Some cursed him and others mocked at him. Homerically care-free, apparently accustomed to the strong waters of life, robust and hard-bitten, here were the charioteers of a strange king, and a strong one.

To his surprise, Sanders saw the wagons begin to swing off the road and park on the flat near a little stream just below where his own men were holding the ragged remnants of his sheep band. The teams began to outspan, men began to pull sagebrush for their coffee fires. Sanders approached to give better study to the freight the wagons carried.

Each vehicle was shrouded in heavy and dusty canvas, but he could see that some of the wagons were loaded with beams black with grease. He saw pulley blocks and iron rods, and a great bulk of iron piping of varied sizes. There was grease, black grease, as the distinguishing mark on all this freight.

Then Andrew Sanders heaved a great sigh. He knew so much, at least, as that such things as these were used in drilling and casing wells! And oil—crude petroleum—left black grease behind it!

What was an oil crew doing here? Why all this secrecy about the advent of the wagon trains? Who was behind it all—and where were these men going?

The wagon master was polite. He told Andrew Sanders that he was stopping here until his boss came; that he had always found it advisable to eat when one had a chance, and nothing better to do. Mr. Sanders received the bland advice that those were matters which could scarcely interest him.

It was at this time that Sanders saw the other and smaller dust cloud from the northward, which he had been awaiting. Young Mr. Henry Simpson, of Ogden, pulled up his car, and Dick Washburn waved a hand for him to clear out, himself descended and approached the employer whom he had been so slow in finding.

Sanders promptly drew him apart. He waved a hand toward the unaccountable apparition of the wagon train.

"I don't know what this outfit is," he admitted; "but I know I've got to get my sheep across the river. I agreed with that fool nester about his homestead, but he's gone crazy. I never got to talk to him, and now I'm never going to talk to him. I'm going to get him and everybody with him, rip out the fence and burn his damned shack. Do you understand? It's worth ten

thousand dollars to me to get across that creek to-night."

Washburn nodded grimly. "What's it worth to me?"

"You're on my pay roll now—I always told you you would be."

Dick Washburn, young in years, but with the gravity of an old man now on his lean features, turned direct to Sanders.

"How much cash have you got along?" said he. "I know where you keep your hand bag—on the buckboard. Is there as much as ten thousand in it to-day?"

The white line of his teeth visible across the dark skin of his bronzed features in his slow smile, he looked to Sanders somberly with narrow eyes; Sanders knew what it meant.

"But, good God, Dick—" he began.

Washburn slowly shook his head, still smiling.

"Ten thousand to you, then!" broke out Sanders desperately; "or all I have along. And I swear I'll never peach on you."

"Is it fifty-fifty of all you've got? That is what you promised. Go get it. Be quick and quiet. I'm tired and I'm getting cross. I haven't had any sleep for two nights."

Sanders all the time was watching Washburn's hands. There was a gun on him somewhere, but where? He started back as Washburn with a casual motion pulled from his pocket a crumpled piece of paper, several typewritten pages.

"Maybe you can learn something out of this," said he. "I haven't had time to read much of it. Do you know that girl up there?" he added.

"No," growled Sanders. "Like enough, some heaver from outside that's started up this joint to feed the automobile trade."

"I was going to ask about that nester over there. That girl up above—does he know her?"

"How do I know? Maybe he does. All that don't bring my sheep back again. What have those people got to do with my affairs?"

"They've maybe got a lot. I like that girl. I want to do something for her before I cash in. I want your help, and I'm going to have it. Now, listen—even if you do try to get a wire out, you know what I'll do with you if I ever suspect you of making any break.

"Now you want that fellow's place up on the hill wiped out, and him with it, and because you think I'm close up to the snubbing post you think you can use me any way you want.

"We were to play fifty-fifty, you to take care of the risk of one sort while I took care of the rest. You've held out on me, and now I want something more than fifty-fifty. I want every dollar you've got along with you, and I know you've got a good deal.

"What's more, you've got to give me a legal right to that money. I'm going to give it all to a girl I've never seen but once; I've got no heirs. But before I go I'm going to play even with you.

"You've been wanting to buy some land. Well, you've bought some right now! You've bought my ranch down in Jackson's Hole, and you're going to pay cash for it right here."

"But I don't want your ranch!" broke in Sanders. "It's ninety miles away, and no oil on it. I want something right in here."

"You don't think you want my ranch? Guess again. I'm telling it to you, I think you do want it. Do you understand?"

Sanders, catching the glint of Washburn's eyes, felt a cold shiver along his spine. He spread out his hands. "Oh, well!"

"I thought so," remarked Washburn. "Now listen—I want a clean title to that money. Do you understand that? I'm going to take your profits away from you and fix you so you can't squeal. I know you carry all sorts of papers and stuff along with you.

"You go get that outfit and write a duplicate contract of sale, me to you, of that ranch down there. You know the description of the land as well as I do, but I'll give it to you once more. Here it is, all the numbers down.

"If you don't want to move west of the sixth principal meridian yourself, you'd better make those papers airtight. I want a copy of the contract, and I want all the money you've got along. It's nigh around ten thousand dollars, and I know it."

Apparently holding no fear whatever of the man to whom he had spoken, Washburn threw himself down and lay motionless in the blaze of the afternoon sun. His employer feared him even then.

Before he reached his men Sanders stopped. He felt paper crinkling in his pocket, began reading the columns whimsically done by Dan Powers the day before; and they solved the problem which had been on Sanders's mind!

Oil, with its immeasurable wealth, its immeasurable power, had been here all along; and he had never thought of it. But who had been the wizard? This nester up on the hill? This was the man whom he had just ordered killed!

The avaricious soul of the sheepman went aflame. Yonder homesteader had fortune in his grasp, because he held possession of some land of his own, whereas he, Andrew Sanders, who had known this country for years, owned not a foot here. He held not an acre under lease.

He knew well enough the shadowy nature of his titles here and there. With oil would come real laws and airtight titles. Land would be measured by the inch. He knew the story of oil in the dry cow country of Texas and Wyoming.

Of course, some one had found oil also in Idaho. If he could get in somewhere near the ground floor he would make vastly quicker and easier money than he ever could in sheep. But how?

Sanders saw his men looking up the road, watching a thin and sinuous trail of dust. There approached at length the figure of a man riding a bicycle at a leisurely gait. He proved to be a well-clad gentleman of middle age, turned out in tweeds, oxfords, gray silk stockings, a panama of parts covering his head.

He had a pleasant face, wholly innocent of guile. Sanders recognized him to be Dr. Burlingham, one of the members at the clubhouse on the lake shore above. The newcomer apparently did not see him, but drew to one side with the leader of the wagon train. The flock master watched them for some moments as they stood, gesturing toward the land across the river. And here, like a poor boy at a party, stood Andrew Sanders, worth three-quarters of a million. There had been dirty work done. He pitied himself almost to tears.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE WHIMS OF MR. WASHBURN.

WASHBURN sat up, refreshed by his few minutes' rest.

"Well?" said he evenly, when Sanders reappeared, satchel in hand.

"If that man across the outlet was off the map," Sanders replied, his eyes narrowing, "we could file on that land. This is a big oil outfit. They're going to drill somewhere. I'll bet he's been their scout all the time."

"Sure, but he isn't off the map."

"Hell!" broke out Sanders. "Want some land to lease—or till I can file on it—or something. You're in pretty bad, but you're a good sort, and I like you and always have."

Washburn smiled slowly as he sat on the ground, his hands clasped in front of his knees.

"That's fine of you," he remarked.

Sanders pretended not to note the sarcasm.

"Yes! We're all out after the long green together, as I understand things. There's one hope for you, and it's right here. If we can get our hooks into this oil proposition before it's too late, I'll make enough money for us both to keep any law in this country from ever catching up with you. We know where this money came from."

Sanders dropped the hand bag on the ground. "Forty thousand in there once, and maybe ten thousand still left; and no one knows it but you and me. Help yourself, and I won't count after you. But I've got to have some man with nerve who'll stick with me. I'm in reach of a million dollars here. Fifty-fifty, Dick!"

Dick Washburn did not even turn a glance toward the hand bag; did not even unclasp his hands. He smiled again slowly, wearily.

"What would a million dollars mean to me? What would it buy me? Just one

horse, that's all; and I'll get that for nothing as soon as I feel strong enough to ride. No, I told you. I want to leave something to my heirs, and the only heir I've got is that girl. I liked her looks. I'd like to help her along after I'm gone."

Sanders saw before him a man three times a murderer within sixty days, and one with a heavy price on his head. Of the steel-like quality of this man's nature he had full enough understanding. But he still attempted to reason.

"You don't understand me, Dick. There's other ways than coarse work. Those Ballantyne people have got three hundred and twenty acres. They're in debt and homesick. You're young and romantic —so's the girl."

"I'm pretty low down, ain't I?" said Washburn after a time.

"I don't call it crooked work to buy that girl's land for three times what it cost her six months ago."

"No, I don't like to do business that way with women folks. I'd rob a bank, but I wouldn't rob that girl. I came down here to get a horse because I wouldn't take one away from her. Have you put that duplicate contract of sale in the bag?"

"Not yet."

"Do it now. You've got a fountain pen."

Andrew Sanders heard his master's voice. He had as deathly a fear of this young man sitting here as he would have had for a cobra. Without any speech he sat down, opened the bag, took out some of the legal blanks he always carried in his nomad life, and using the side of the heavy hand bag for a desk top, wrote the document which passed legal possession of the ranch of Richard Washburn, of Jackson's Hole, in return for $10,478.00, in hand paid in currency.

"There's times when a man has to gamble, Dick," he said, the sweat breaking out on his forehead as he finished this extraordinary transaction in real estate he did not wish to buy. "I'll take the chance to oblige you. I know you'll do what's right by me. This bird here, whoever he is, is not the only one who's going to make money if they strike anything in this valley. I haven't got an acre under title in the Powder Basin. If I had, I would make a company before to-morrow morning, by wire from Big Springs."

"But you're not going to Big Springs, Sanders," said Washburn quietly.

"What do you mean?"

"I wouldn't trust you. You could easy get all this money back, and ten thousand more on top of it. But you are going to stay right here. What's a million dollars to me? How far can a horse go in one straight ride? Leave me alone. I want to go to sleep."

This time Dick Washburn rested his head against the satchel as he composed himself, and his forefinger was hooked around the trigger of the heavy gun which rested on his breast. He lay, cobra like, a thing of menace even in his sleep. The other man feared to shoot down into him, helpless as he appeared.

Each time that Sanders attempted to approach the calm and well-clad gentleman whom he now suspected to be the actual author and contriver of these activities, some quiet man stepped up to him and motioned him aside. It was plain that if these men had a secret they intended to keep it. With nothing definite in his own mind he heard a call passing down the line. The teamsters were hooking up, the train was about to advance.

CHAPTER XIX.

OIL!

THE older Thompson boy did not fail to give Battersleigh the cordial berating which Dan Powers withheld.

"You old fool!" said he. "Now you've begun shooting and killed a lot of sheep. They'll come back again, these people."

Battersleigh could only respond with further sputtering proof of his own wrath. Powers quieted both factions.

"We're all in for some shooting," said he. "We'd better dig in a little—let's go down the hill and scrape out a hole."

This done, the defenders of the fence could do no more than wait for the movements of the enemy.

They were mystified by the approach of a heavy cloud of dust to the southward, the halt of the caravan, whatever it was. It was quite late in the afternoon when once more they saw the thin trail of a bicyclist, passing to the northward.

He turned away from the road, threw down his machine, and approached on foot. Powers recognized Doctor Burlingham. Sculling the boat across the stream, he met the visitor at the fence.

"Some circus," said Burlingham, motioning to the dead sheep. "What are you people trying to do?"

"It was Batty," explained Powers.

Burlingham looked him squarely in the eyes, with his own steely orbs. "I've come over here to tell you a few things," said he. "You've maybe mixed the game a little bit, but you haven't stopped it.

"There'll be an oil camp here on this flat two days from now. I'm wagoning this stuff up for reasons of my own from Big Springs instead of the closer railroad points. There was better chance to keep it quiet. That's what I was telegraphing about a while ago, the time you broke your leg.

"I got this outfit from my Oklahoma fields. We were going to Louisiana, but I had to stay and take care of you just to pass the time—and I have my own ideas of passing the time. I thought I'd have them come in here."

"But why didn't you tell me?"

"My son," said Hard-Boiled Burlingham, "I didn't even tell one friend at the club, and I'm living there with some of my best friends."

"With you and me in a poker game," said Powers, "there might be occasion for hope. You told me you had all the money you wanted."

"I have, but I can't help making it." Burlingham turned upon him a face of somber intentness. "This is the new day of the world. The man who can develop something of fit size for it is fit to live in it. The man who finds oil is a good patriot—if he spends his own money trying. Name of God! if you're going to be a speculator, learn to speculate, and play your own game and not the other fellow's."

Dan stood looking at him quietly, trying to comprehend this strange character. Burlingham did not speak for quite a time, but finally went on.

"Well," he sighed, looking away, "that's my sort of applied patriotism. Isn't it a big day, when you stop to think of it? Don't you feel something great underneath human life to-day? What is it? I don't know."

He turned at length to Powers, almost shyly, almost ashamed for having uncovered his nature before another.

"Where shall we sink her?" he asked. "The first rig goes up wherever you say. Name the spot—just so it's inside your lines."

Dan stood for a moment wondering what all this meant or might mean for him.

"I don't see where I get off in this," he replied, finally. "I made up a story about there being oil here—I just guessed it from a word or so you'd said to me."

Burlingham smiled. "This is the guessingest business there is in all the world. I don't care for the money very much. I want the—well, call it success. Call it a dream, if you want to. When you get to be as rich as I am, you can afford to dream. Pick 'em any way you like."

"Meantime," said Powers, "homestead lands and mineral lands are two different things. A desert entry is something also different—and we've not got the water on that yet up yonder. A certain time has got to elapse before any homestead can be proved up. In other words, there are several things and yet again some other things."

Burlingham only smiled. "There is no law to prevent my boring all kinds of woodpecker holes on the edge of your claim. It isn't proved to be mineral lands and nobody's going to prove it any quicker than I can. You won't let any one else on your claim to bore, and no one else is apt to come. Suppose it takes a year and a half to drill as deep as I want to—just this side of deep enough. You get your title first if there's any doubt about the law in your mind. You started it for a homestead, didn't you."

"There's the thousand I owe you," said Dan. "And there's my friends."

"Neighborly details; we'll take care of those things. There's more than one way of making money out of an oil town. Old Batty was crazy, that's true. But the courthouse that he saw will go up behind the high school."

"And the high iron bridge?" smiled Powers, pointing toward the ford.

"Yes, and all the rest. I hope you'll sell one of my girls some frontage. She'll probably put up an Elizabethan cottage," he added pleasantly. "Fact is, I'm a little bit in doubt about even that. I don't know whether to call our concern the Only Annie Company or the Silver Dot."

Dan turned upon him sharply. "What do you mean?" said he. "Where did you ever hear that name—Silver Dot?"

"Hear it? I didn't hear it. I saw it."

"Oh, there in Chicago?"

"Not in the least. I painted the sign for it yesterday, but I didn't invent the name—Annie suggested that herself. She said she rather liked the name. It's a good sign, although I'm not sure which way the letter D turns."

He was looking down the flat and did not notice Dan Powers's face.

CHAPTER XX.

IN THE DARK.

WHEN Ed Stanley drew up the boat at the marge a quarter of a mile above the outlet, he left Annie Ballantyne sitting alone.

He made his way along the beach at the foot of the bluff and finally parted the willows at the point where the outlet left the lake. He could see the trampled ground and the dead sheep lying beyond the fence, and also could see far down the valley to the heavy dust cloud whose nature he could only guess.

If there had been a battle, and so it seemed, neither side remained upon the field so far as he could see. Ignorant of the fact that the defenders of the homestead were sitting in line below the crest of the hill, he moved back up the beach and made his way to the house. He found it empty. He presently hurried back through the cover of the coulee and again found the waiting girl at the boat.

"I can't find out nothing at all," said he. "There ain't nobody home. I'm goin' to take you on back home up the lake. I'll come down this evening and find out all about it and tell you afterward. I'll just row on up. That motor thing makes too much noise to suit me right now."

This journey required more than an hour and it was passed for the most part in silence. Stanley tried his best to make conversation with no reference to what had gone on between them earlier in the afternoon, and Annie tried her best in turn to do the same. They had poor success.

Evening came apace for all those thus engaged at cross purposes here or there in the smiling Powder Basin valley. Powder Peak, with its outline of an Indian head on top, looked down impassively at the scenes in the valley. The great wagon train moved forward sluggishly. The flat filled up with wagons. A village of tents sprung up. The whole face of the landscape changed.

As to Sanders and his own bivouac below, neither he nor his henchmen could get inkling of the plans of the wagon train. Sanders once more approached Dick Washburn.

"Why don't you get up and do something, Dick?" he demanded. "I've done everything in the world I could for you, haven't I?"

"I've been making medicine," the desperado replied. "My medicine has not been strong."

"Well, it'll be dark before long. At least take a scout out above and find out what you can and let me know."

"You seem to me like a hen with one chicken," said Washburn. "You don't know which may you want to go, fussing around this way."

"How can I tell until I learn more about what's going on? I tell you everything's out on a tight wire right now."

"All right," Washburn agreed. "When it's dark I'll go up to the camp and look around."

He took with him, without comment, the handbag and its contents, and now an automatic was easily visible on either hip. With a quiet "So long" to Sanders, he turned

away and headed westward across the sagebrush flat.

He kept on until the dry land merged into the wet margin of the stream, plunged in, his weapons and his plunder-bag held above his head, and floundered out wet completely. He felt the chill of the evening air, but did no more than shake himself and squeeze what water he could out of his garments.

Toward dusk he began to skirt the western shore of the stream, where for the most part, even if it had been daylight, he would have been out of sight in the willow fringe. He stopped and looked at the red, flickering campfires. He had always liked to see the lights of camp or of home when he came in from the hunt or the trail or other part of his outdoor life.

He stopped and looked hungrily now, thinking what it might mean to see the friendly lights of a home welcoming him as he came in. But home—that could never be for him. In sixty days the snows would drive him out of the mountains. At the utmost that would be Dick Washburn's term of life.

He knew that, but he went on with his curious, stoical plan. He intended to rob his partner, who had tried to rob him. He intended to give the proceeds to some one who was clean and innocent. It was his notion of a good way to close out his life. An odd man, Washburn, and of a fate that some called pathetic.

It would be easy to kill this homesteader here, but the bandit had no intention of doing that. He could never touch that girl's hand, she would never look into his eyes, she would never put a light in the window to shine red for his welcome, but maybe she would, some day, for some other man. He could do that much at least. Maybe this nester was that other man.

Dick Washburn picked up his handbag and continued his progress along the bank of the stream, feeling his hatred of humanity dying in his heart. To kill Sanders, certainly and surely—that had been his unshakable intent ever since Sanders had double crossed him and turned him up for the bank robbery in the Teton country—a robbery which Sanders himself had planned, and in which he shared.

Yes, he was going to kill Sanders when he got done with him, but not anybody else. How could he ever sleep again in his few remaining nights, if there were looking at him the eyes of a girl like that one yonder!

He kept steadily on up the bank of the river, between it and the bench lands on the western side. After a long walk he came to the lower wire which marked Dan Powers's claim on the southern boundary. That gave him his bearings. He started to climb the steep slope above which rose the plateau Powers had selected for his building place. He could see the loom of the cabin against the sky.

He was frontiersman enough to know that a dark house is a dangerous house. There might be some one inside, lying low for any visitors. Crawling about the place in a wide semicircle, he kept off.

In the dark, he stumbled almost into the little trench or rifle pit, which Powers and his friends had dug that afternoon—and smiled grimly, for he knew what it meant. As he crawled along he laid a hand on top of the fresh dirt and felt something soft there in the dark. It was a man's coat which some one had left there; as it chanced, that of Battersleigh. "I'll just take this along with me," muttered Washburn to himself.

He wanted to have one more look at that house. He might learn something there. He completed the circuit, passing a considerable distance above the tops of the thicket through which Ed Stanley had peered earlier in that afternoon. From his own station he now could see the outline of the house. It was dark.

But then all at once something happened which caused him to drop flat upon the ground, cobra like, indeed, his eyes narrowed, his whole figure ready to strike.

Some one was in the house! Some one had struck a match—some one just now was lighting a lamp. Some one passed between the light and the window—the figure of a man. Was it the nester? Washburn wanted to see what that man looked like.

Slowly, very slowly, an inch at a time, he edged up the slope toward the flat place where stood Dan Powers's cabin. In the night on the frontier, with enemies about,

a lighted house is indeed a dangerous house —for those inside; the safer for any one outside.

He stalked the place inch by inch and foot by foot, silent as a snake, until at length he could see the interior through the window, himself unseen. Slowly, weapon in hand, he moved from side to side until he had the view of the entire interior of the only room which was lighted—that where Dan cooked, ate, and labored during the day.

There was a typewriter standing on the table. There was a little stove beyond, a box covered with dishes; he knew all about the interior of a bachelor's shack.

Who was in there? There was a man, a large man, tall, roughly dressed, somewhere over forty years of age, sitting on one of the seats beyond the stove, his face just turning toward the door. Washburn could hear him speak.

"Now you'll have to stay here, Miss Annie. It 'll be all right. I'm just going down to the foot of the hill and I'll holler for them to come across."

Was this the nester? The killer did not know Ed Stanley, for he was a stranger in Powder Basin himself. But he did know the person to whom he had been speaking. No mistaking who she was.

She stood now, her face half turned, as sensitively suspicious of danger as a wild deer. He got again the picture of her as he had seen her that very morning, in her trim jacket, her neat riding breeches. He could see once more the tender outline of throat and chin.

This was his heiress. He now had seen her twice. He carried her legacy in his hand.

Himself motionless, hardly breathing, he waited. He saw her turn slowly away from the window, saw her walk to the table, bend over it. But then, for some reason that Washburn could not divine—she stooped forward, eagerly reading the pages that lay on the table.

"Oh!" he heard her exclaim. "Oh, what is this?" He saw her catch up a sheet from the table and turn toward the man who had accosted her—the man he did not know.

And at that moment—with the picture of her filling all his wild and strange young soul—with the riddle of her quick exclamation forever unsolved for him—with all the riddle of life unsolved for him forever, Dick Washburn dropped on the ground at his feet the hand bag and the coat which he carried on one side, the pistol that he carried in the other hand.

He straightened and sank down in a huddle in the dark. The occupants of the cabin heard the shot which killed him.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE NIGHT RIDER.

THE problem of Andrew Sanders now was to break into the enemy's camp. But no word came to him from his spy afield. Hours passed and the night made no sign. In his uneasiness he walked on up the flat, alone in the semiluminous light of the late twilight.

His own bivouac lay sullen and indifferent back of him. His sheep had found water, but in their hunger they were ready to eat almost the pebbles of the earth, so that they were restless still in spite of the best handling they could get from their experienced guards. None of his men noticed the departure of the owner from his tent.

Along the road which crossed the valley there passed during the daylight hours greater or less numbers of the motor cars. Many cars, even this late at night, bowled past him as he stood in the darkness peering anxiously toward the encampment whose fires he could see.

He turned back again at length on the dusty highway which connected the two camps, and was at the edge of his own camp when he heard the chug of an approaching motor car and caught the sweep of its lights as it rounded a little curve.

The cough of the motor was broken, it lacking apparently half its power. When his own figure appeared in its shaft of light on ahead, the driver of the car slowed down, stopped and accosted him.

"Hello, neighbor! Is there a garage anywhere around here?"

Sanders was too irritated to care for a man with engine trouble. Before he replied the other went on with a question which caused him to pause. "And tell me, have you seen anything of a big train of oil-well stuff on ahead here somewhere?"

"Why, now, about that," began Sanders, guardedly. "Who are you and why do you ask?"

"Are you with that outfit?" demanded the newcomer. He climbed down out of the car and came into the light, discoverable now to be a young man of full habit of body, a prominent eye and a forehead a trifle bald.

"Well, you ask me, don't you?" smiled Sanders with sudden interest. "I might want to ask you something, too, although I don't in the least know who you are."

"And got none the best of me at that," returned the young man.

"Before you go on up, would you like a little drink?" asked Sanders, pleasantly, after a rapid estimate of his man.

"I would. But you ain't got any?"

"I hate to tell a perfect stranger that he lies," replied Sanders. "I always take a nip before I go to bed."

The truth was that he drank very little; indeed almost never except for business reasons which he fancied now existed. But he proceeded to unlock another battered hand bag lashed to the foot of the buckboard seat and produced a bottle of pale colored liquor. He motioned to the other to join him.

"This wasn't made in old Kentucky," he explained, as he uncorked the bottle and extended it for olfactory proof; "but it came from West Virginia, and it's straight corn. Not so old as some, but it's clean stuff, and anything's good to-day."

He tipped the bottle and drank deeply himself, willing to feel the kick of strong stimulation after his day of disappointments.

"Well, I'll take a chance," said the young man. "If it kills one, it kills both of us. Here's regards."

The sudden familiarity of alcohol came to them. The rapt glance of the young man showed that he had no present intention of leaving a full bottle.

"I'll tell you, stranger," began the sheepman, "I don't know your name: I'm Andrew Sanders, and this is my camp—I live down at the falls when I'm home. These are my sheep, and I'm just driving south for the fall.

"Now I'll tell you why I want to know about these oil men. They came bulging into my band this afternoon and broke it all up. Now I'm going to take that sort of thing into the courts as soon as I can.

"I wanted to find out something about these people—whether they're responsible or not. I didn't know but you might know something about them, since you're coming up from the lower country yourself."

"I used to work with them, where they came from."

"Yes? Where was that?"

"Oklahoma. That's one of the biggest oil concerns in all the lower fields."

"It takes some funds to swing a proposition like that." In the darkness no one could see the eager interest in Sanders's eyes.

"I'll say it does."

"Well, I'll tell you," Sanders remarked evenly, "oil is a game that I want to break into myself. Sheep and banks and that sort of thing are all right, but they're too slow for a man like me. What I was going to say is that for men with good minds, like you and me, there are no gates up that can't be got over. I've got money of my own."

"You're saying things, friend," assented Ben Schooley—so he introduced himself—nodding solemnly. "Lord, Lord, what's wages for any man? We're all after ours, ain't it the truth?"

"That's whatever."

"Always some other fellow on ahead has got more than what we have, ain't it so? I didn't allow to stop at wages in anybody's oil works, I'll tell you that—not little Benny. I always knew some day I'd break in. But how, that's the question."

Sanders only nodded, but in the dark his eye glittered. The newcomer went on carelessly now.

"The boss fired me because I was too anxious to get mine. He plays with his cards close up to the bosom all the time.

And me sharpening tools for him—me fixing drills for him. What was under the steel? Why, millions! What did I get? Why, nothing!"

"And so you sort of trailed along to see where his next break would be?" Sanders spoke quietly, but his heart was throbbing hard. "Yes. I see how that could be."

"You got me! When he didn't go to Arkansas, but headed for Idaho, I knew something was up, and something sure. That's the way I figured it, and that's how I'm here. I ain't got much but my brains, but I've got them."

"Well," said Sanders, turning a trifle suddenly, and moved by his present frame of mind to help himself to a second drink of the illicit liquor, "I've got my brains and I've got a million dollars, and I've got a grouch against that outfit up there a good deal bigger than you have.

"Now look here," he went on. "It's as you say; things have to happen sudden in this oil game, or they don't happen at all. We have to travel fast together if we travel at all. But suppose I could lie on the outside with the money, and you could break into the inside news—why, there might be something doing. What?"

"Well, what do you know about that? There sure would."

"I know every foot of land in this valley. You couldn't touch a foot of it tomorrow except at one place. That's owned by a woman. The title or lease of that land might possibly be handled by a man who had genius in big things—a man like yourself."

Ben Schooley's covetousness aided his vanity. "Tell me about it," he said.

"I mean the old Ed Stanley ranch at the head of the lake. Some people from the East bought in there this spring and they're there now. Their name's Ballantyne."

Ben Schooley suddenly stiffened as he sat, his hand on the bottle which rested on the ground. When he did speak at length it was half to himself.

"Wouldn't that beat hell?" he muttered. "Wouldn't it beat hell, now!"

"I suppose like enough it would," said Sanders, "but I don't know what you mean."

"I'll tell you," said Schooley. "I used to work for a man named Ballantyne back in Ioway. Him and his people moved out here into Idyho: that was another reason I didn't mind coming out this way. There was other reasons.

"I worked for old man Ballantyne back there. He fired me. Now I'm only a poor man, one way of saying, but I've got brains—as much brains as any man, see!"

"Yes, I see," replied Sanders, who still was sober. "Out in this country we learn to tell a man mighty soon after we see him."

"But now I'm telling you about these people. I always said I'd follow that girl some time, no matter where she went. I knew she wasn't far from here. I was willing enough to trail in behind old Hard-Boiled Burlingham once more—for several reasons."

"You've got a job now," said Sanders, quietly.

The young man reached out a large hand. "You mean it? Well, I'll say you're a fast worker. That's me, too!"

"Well, it's about some leases that I want to talk to you. You're on my payroll now at fifty a week, and one-tenth of all the profits we make. I furnish all the capital we need."

"Well, that's settled. But let me tell you, if you're working around Hard-Boiled Burlingham, you've got no time to lose."

"We're not going to lose time. Now what I want you to do"—Sanders pointed the finger of command, for already he knew the man who sat before him—"is to get some sort of title to that land at the head of the lake. How much money did they have when they left Iowa?"

"Not over five thousand at the outside, maybe not that. They sold their home."

"Ten thousand would look pretty good to them right now, then? We've got to get hold of that piece of land under lease or title. You won't be robbing them."

Schooley was twisting grass between his fingers. "That girl's no fool. She might smell a rat."

"If you trade before breakfast, you're doing something for yourself. Then you've got to get on across to Centennial, to the government land office. Get to the register

of the land office before any one else does. I know him, and he knows me—never mind why, but Pete Stilson will do anything I tell him to do. Now you tell him to cancel that Daniel Powers homestead entry and to hold up his desert entry, because there's fraud under both of them—that's mineral land and not agricultural land, and I can prove they knew it.

"And tell Stilson"—Sanders's hand was now on the other's knee in no light grasp—"that he's got to refuse every other filing that comes in there now—not to file a paper that hasn't got my O. K. on it, until I see him. Tell him that I'm onto something big, and that he's in on it, too, but he's got to come through absolutely for me.

"Don't tell him where it is. He won't know you, and won't know where you come from. I'll give you a line to him so he won't be scared. By that time I hope you'll have something to report from those pilgrims up at the head of the lake."

"You are a fast worker!"

"You'll find me that. What you ought to do is to go up there right now.

"Some job to break in there in the middle of the night."

"It's going to be some job to break in there any time. Now you do a little listening to me, young man. Men don't come along and make you a present of a million dollars on a plate out of the kindness of their hearts. They want something for themselves, and if you can't produce it, you're off the game. I get nothing unless you put over that talk up there—neither do you."

"Trust me for that," said Schooley, assuming courage though he felt it not. He patted his rather rotund figure and brushed some dust from a sleeve.

Sanders had gaged his man accurately enough. "I'll get you the papers you need," he added now. "In my business I always have to carry a lawyer's office around with me. I'll write you a check—don't show it till you know you've got the owner's name on a contract. I'll get you the letter for Pete Stilson.

"When you get back from Centennial get here to me as soon as you can. You'll find my contract waiting for you then."

He took the bottle from Ben Schooley's perilous neighborhood and stepped inside his tent, pressing the electric torch which lay under the head of his blanket roll, and then finding the battered little box which served him as a traveling desk. An able man in his way and in his time, Andrew Sanders.

He felt a certain contempt for the bedroll on the ground, a certain resentment toward the odor which hung around the spot since the sheep had passed. He knew that another day was about to dawn.

CHAPTER XXII.

FRANKLIN CITY.

WHEN he had finished his first brief talk with Burlingham at the wire fence near the ford, Dan Powers rejoined the three figures on the hillside.

"Batty," he said, waving a hand, "your dreams have come true. Behold Franklin City."

"I knew it," the old man agreed, simply. "I knew it would come."

"You took up the letter I gave you, didn't you?" Powers added, casually.

Battersleigh slapped himself on the chest in sudden dismay, now missing the coat which he had worn.

"Ye poor idjit!" he expostulated. "Don't ye know enough never to give a letter to another man for postin', especially one for a lady? I put both the letters you give me in me breast pocket, but I laid off the coat when we were diggin' the pit yonder. I'll get them safe and sound. In the mornin' I'll carry them up."

Powers did not get the full value of Battersleigh's reply as he turned to speak to Burlingham.

"We'll take you across," said the older Thompson boy. "We've got to be getting back home now."

"No, you all come along with me," repeated Burlingham. "They've got the trucks unloaded, and maybe we can find one that can do four miles an hour—we'll all have supper at the clubhouse."

It was all quiet and matter of fact, as if they were returning home from a day of

simple labor in the open, and were weary. Battersleigh especially was silent. He did not cast an eye across the flats where so often he had builded his vision city.

Burlingham hurried them all into the log cabin which for the time he had as his summer home. He drew Dan to one side.

"Of course, you know nothing is sure in this business until it's actually in hand. Now I want you to run over to Centennial, to the land office, to-morrow morning at the latest. We've got to get all the facts about this land situation definite and clear."

Powers nodded. "All right," he said, "I'll go over."

"Well, are you sorry you borrowed that money of me?" the older man asked suddenly.

"I'm not crazy about taking anybody's money as a gift."

Burlingham chuckled. "Well, I'll tell you," said he, "if you can hornswoggle the land office to let you hold down that much land all in one bunch, desert, agricultural and mineral; and if you can raise next summer three hundred tons of real hay, I'll be willing to think that you've demonstrated.

"There'll be a time, son, when we'll stand on the edge of your hill over there and look down into four thousand feet of sixteen-inch mystery. If she gushes a thousand a day, or six hundred or three hundred, we're rich. If it's a dry hole we're not.

"You see there's something you can stumble over between the cup and the lip? Maybe I've mixed my metaphors. I will now mix the drinks. Come on."

Perhaps he was testing out the young man. None but himself could say. It was more likely that he trusted his sangfroid and admired his independence. Burlingham himself had seen men go into battle singing, and for heroics he had small use. He loved game animals, and thought he knew one.

"There's just one more thing I'd like to ask of you as a favor, colonel," said Dan, as presently they seated themselves.

"Well, what is it this time,"

"Well, my old 'plane is back on the Long Island aviation field where I left her. I was telling Battersleigh one day over on the hill yonder at my place that some time Geraldine and I would step into the boat together, and I'd take off on the flat in front of the house."

"Geraldine!" Burlingham growled.

Battersleigh suddenly interrupted, something again forcing itself to the front in his absorbed state of mind.

"I had both of the two letters in me breast pocket," he announced. "I'll get them this evening. The coat's right there where I left it."

"Both of them—what do you mean?" Powers colored a trifle. "I only wrote one, that is—"

"Now yer a liar, son," Battersleigh declared, amiably. "There was two letters there, and I addressed them both to Miss Annie Ballantyne, as ye told me."

Dan Powers suddenly remembered his own solemn gravity when he had folded and inclosed his letter to Geraldine. "I'm sorry, Batty," he said. "Bring them back to me. You needn't deliver either of them now."

"Geraldine!" resumed the rumbling voice of Hard-Boiled Burlingham. "She is not Geraldine, but Annie, and she runs the Silver Dot not two miles from where we are sitting."

Once more Dan Powers thought it wiser not to attempt any speech. The Silver Dot! How did that unusual name get out here in the wilderness? He supposed it must be some name in a chain system of restaurants.

CHAPTER XXIII.

MR. SCHOOLEY ARRIVES.

IT was midnight when Ben Schooley, having wheezed up the road past the oil encampment and along the eastern shore of the lake, found himself at the turn of the road which led to the westward. By this time the courage born in West Virginia largely had forsaken him.

It had been a rather pleasant and hopeful trail until now, while the whisky impetus lasted. He wished that his new employer had had the manners not to take away the bottle while it remained half full.

In truth, Schooley's heart was low in his bosom when toward eleven o'clock he pulled up at the wide gate of the Ballantyne ranch.

He passed around to the side of the house whence issued the rays of light that he had seen, and knocked at the door after he had drawn back the screen. Within came the shuffle of a foot moving on the floor. A thin, quavering voice exclaimed, "Who's there?"

He recognized the voice. Mrs. Ballantyne, then, still was among the living. He did not reply, but knocked again. Shuffling footfalls advanced now. The door opened. There stood before him in silhouette against the lamp light the tall, bent figure of John Ballantyne. By this time the old man was beginning to recover from the stroke which had threatened to leave him bedridden.

He was white now—white of hair and skin. His head drooped oddly, a little awry, and his shoulders seemed thin and curved forward. His limbs were thinner, too, and one might have noted the veined look of the thin hands that rested on top of the stick against which he leaned.

"Good evening," said the caller, stepping farther into the light. "You don't know me?"

When the old man did recognize him an instant later, he drew back.

"Yes, I'd know you anywhere, Ben Schooley," said he. "What is it you want here? Why have you followed us? I know no reason for your coming." He filled the door as Schooley attempted to step forward.

"I'll tell you what I'm doing here, and when I do you'll see I'm a big enough man to forgive anything—yes, and I want to do something for them that has used me hard. I'm in shape to do something now. I'm hooked up with an oil outfit that's made me rich."

"And what is that to us?"

"I want to make you all rich, too. I wanted to show that—wanted to tell you and Annie that."

The old man smiled thinly. "Annie is not here."

"Where is she, then; coming back soon?"

"Perhaps. It is nothing to you when she comes."

"All I wanted of her was one more witness that I'm on the square."

There came an interruption.

"Who is that, John? What does he want? Come here, John."

John Ballantyne turned to the room in which lay his invalid wife. "Yes, Jennie," he replied. "That is Ben Schooley—our old workman. I don't know why he is here."

By this time Schooley had stepped into the other room and taken a chair. He called out now aloud.

"Don't be scared, Aunt Jennie. It's only Ben Schooley. I've come out to see if I couldn't do something for you all—that is, if you call twenty thousand dollars anything, Aunt Jennie."

"What's that he said, John?" demanded the old woman. "Twenty thousand dollars!" She rocked her head from side to side. "If we had that much money we could go away from here."

"Yes, leave it, Uncle John, and live the way you want to. I'll buy this place if you'll sell it to me—take it off your hands so you'll never have to worry again. I don't know what you paid for it, but I know you haven't owned it long, and I'll give you five times what it cost you, no matter what that was."

But by this time Schooley was so well started as to be hard to rebuff.

"You ought to go back to Shelbyville, Uncle John. If you were back in the old house, and the old business there, all the debts paid—that's the only place you'll ever be happy."

"I could not believe you, Ben Schooley," said old John, simply.

"Then don't believe me, Uncle John. Let my money talk."

"What is it all about, John?" Jennie Ballantyne's curiosity at least was strong.

"I was just telling him, Aunt Jennie, that I'd buy you out here, if you wanted me to, so you could go back home again."

"I wonder what Annie would say to all this," Ballantyne said, half to himself. "She would see to the bottom of it."

The old man's uneasiness overcame him

once more. Nervously he stepped across the room and hobbled around to the rear of the house, turning the corner as he had a score of times that night to peer anxiously down over the black velvet carpet of the lake. John Ballantyne, normal man, and courageous as he always had been, felt himself seized with sudden, unaccountable apprehension. At length he turned back toward the house.

He had been gone from the room for only a few moments. That brief time served for an approachment between Jennie Ballantyne and Ben Schooley which the latter could not have dreamed.

"Just what is it you're talking about—what do you mean?" asked the invalid, reaching out a thin arm from the bed covering and touching Schooley's sleeve. "Give me that deed—let me see it—and the check. Forty thousand dollars. We could be happy then. I could get something done for my heart. You've no idea what a sinking—"

"Who owns the place, Aunt Jennie?" he asked. "Whose name is the title in?"

"Why, me myself — it's made in my name. I could sell it any time I liked so far as that goes. You haven't got any money?"

Schooley showed her the check, including the signature at the bottom. "Andrew Sanders — that's a cashier's check. He's the president of two banks, and worth a million dollars. Of course, it's the same as money in the bank—I wouldn't want to carry thousands of dollars in currency around with me in a strange country. And you say the deed was made out to you, Aunt Jennie?"

"Yes, yes, I could find it if I was up and around."

"Well, here's a deed to me, or what will come to it, Aunt Jennie. Never mind what the others say. Sign the contract of sale right here, and I'll leave you this check for ten thousand, and if I don't bring you thirty thousand dollars more inside of two weeks, you've got the place and all just like it was. I want to prove to Uncle John that I'm a man of my word."

His own hands trembling, he held out to her trembling hands the papers which he drew from his pocket, and passed her the fountain pen which he had ready.

And Jennie Ballantyne scrawled her name! Ben Schooley drew the paper from her hand.

"Give it back to me!" exclaimed the old woman in sudden fear. "Maybe I've done wrong." She put a skinny hand to her throat. "Give it back before John comes. Don't tell him anything about it."

"I won't!" Schooley exclaimed. "You've sold something, Aunt Jennie Ballantyne, as sure's you're born."

He was out of the door into the rear room before she could protest further. He met Ballantyne just as the latter was coming in.

"You're going, Ben Schooley?" said the old man.

"Yes, I'm on my way. This oil business keeps me on the jump. Good night! You'll see me again."

An instant later he rushed around the corner and was gone, the chug of the motor announcing that he had reached his car.

Ballantyne went back to the room where his wife lay in bed. Her eyes were unnaturally bright.

"What's wrong, Jennie?" he asked. He was sensitive to her emotions.

"John!"

Then she began to weep, and at last told him what she had done. John sat for a long time.

"There escaped a scoundrel in the dark," he said. "And you have done this! Lord God in heaven, how hard at times it is for the strong to carry the weak!"

The kindness of his gentle nature caused Jennie Ballantyne's weak mind again to swing, and she caught courage from her own avarice. "But he'll bring back the money, won't he, John? See—look here—he left this."

"I don't know whose check this is or what may be done with it, or what you have signed in the way of this option which he mentioned. Why an option? Why should he want this land?

"I have heard of options in oil countries, yes—but not here. If Annie is obliged to run an ice cream parlor to keep up the interest on our mortgage, how can any one

else buy this place at eight times what we gave for it and make it carry charges? Jennie, there's something wrong."

CHAPTER XXIV.

A STRANGE LEGACY.

BURLINGHAM and his guests at dinner knew nothing of what went on at Sanders's camp below, nor did Sanders know of events at the oil encampment; nor could any one living at the upper end of the lake have knowledge of what was going on five miles to the southwest, for, the telephone lacking, it would have required a journey thither to verify any surmise or suspicion.

John Ballantyne thought that, perhaps, he had heard a single shot, fired around ten o'clock in the night. That was after all the men at the oil encampment had turned in for the night. At that time Dan Powers was still at the clubhouse with Burlingham. Neither of these heard the shot.

Sanders heard it, and the men at the oil encampment heard it, and knew it was at or near the Powers homestead across the outlet. But although Sanders suspected that his messenger, Dick Washburn, had fired the shot, he waited all that night without definite knowledge; and as is known, he had just before that time dispatched his other messenger, Ben Schooley, to the northward along the road.

But of all the actors, widely scattered here and there over the vast panorama of the mountain scene, there were now only three living who could tell who had fired the mysterious shot; and these were Ed Stanley and Annie Ballantyne—both night scouting for information at the lower end of the lake—and Henry Battersleigh, late one of the Burlingham dinner party.

Stanley had spent some time after dusk that evening investigating matters at the ford or just below it; but not caring to leave his companion alone, he did not cross the stream, and hence had no exact information. They were in the house, and Stanley had at length responded to Annie's importunities for a light, when Dick Washburn stood looking through the window.

And by that time, old Battersleigh had sculled across the outlet in search of the coat which he had left behind. Indeed, Washburn preceded him at the little rifle pit by no more than a very few moments.

Shocked into sudden terror by the rifle report close at hand, Stanley sprang to the door. There, huddled with head almost at the threshold, lay the figure of a man. And just beyond, striding rifle in hand toward the door, there was approaching the tall figure of Battersleigh.

"Who are you?" demanded Stanley, his own rifle ready. But Battersleigh called out hoarsely, "On guard in there! Who are ye in the house? I've saved ye from somebody, no matter who ye are."

He did not then know that Annie Ballantyne was there—indeed, had known nothing at all, excepting that he had seen a man standing beyond the window. His own shot, fired without certitude of object or aim, had caught the lurking Washburn through the body.

They carried the stricken man into the house, where Annie was standing still in a frozen terror. They placed the limp figure on the bunk.

"Who is he? What made you shoot?" demanded Stanley.

"Who is he? A murderer—didn't you see him aiming through the window?"

Annie stood, her eyes fixed now upon the bluish pale face that lay with eyes closed.

"I know him!" she exclaimed. "I saw him this very morning—up at my place!" In almost incoherent words she told the story of the visit of this very man.

Stanley bent over him more closely.

"From the description that's out," said he, "this is Dick Washburn. Batty, you've done something that the sheriffs of three States couldn't do. There was ten thousand dollars for Dick Washburn, dead or alive."

But Battersleigh stood, only looking at the long figure of the man who lay there. He shook his head. Without a word he stepped into the next room and sat down in the dark alone. Stanley followed him in after a time, to cross-examine him.

"I came down from the clubhouse after

my coat," said Battersleigh. "When I got to the place where I left it down the hill, it wasn't there. I thought maybe I'd left it at the house, so I came up. I saw him standing there. He was ready to shoot. Go out and get his pistol."

Ed Stanley stepped out beside the door once more. He brought back Washburn's pistol where it had fallen by his hand, also the coat which Battersleigh had mentioned—and something else which caused them all to wonder; a battered little hand bag, partly filled with something—they did not know what.

"Thief to the last!" exclaimed Battersleigh. "That's my coat—and he come here to steal more." There was a movement of the limp figure on the bunk. The smitten man tried to raise a hand, tried to turn his head.

"What is it, Dick?" demanded Ed Stanley, bending over him. "I won't hurt you. Are you hit bad?"

"Gone," whispered the young man faintly. The blankets were dripping blood. It was a matter of minutes at the outside.

"Open—it!" His voice was very faint. They understood that he wished them to open the little hand bag. His eyes were on Annie. She brought the open bag to the edge of the bunk.

The bag contained nothing except packets of money, currency of large denominations for the most part. There was one bit of white paper, folded lengthwise.

"Mine," whispered the sinking man. "That's mine." With his eyes he motioned to the girl to read the paper:

> To all Whom It May Concern:
>
> This will certify that I have bought of Richard Washburn, of Teton County, Wyoming, that certain tract of land located in the said Teton County, Wyoming, described as follows * * * (the legal description following); that I have paid to said Richard Washburn in hand the sum of ten thousand dollars ($10,000), and hold receipt for same and agreement of said Richard Washburn to execute and deliver to me so soon as opportunity may offer, warranty deed to the foregoing lands. And to this agreement in writing, which is to be understood as a deed to the foregoing lands pending better instrument of writing for record, the said Richard Washburn has set his hand and seal in full agreement this day; this being a contract of record and an agreement by both the parties whose names are attached hereto, and good against any claims on the property of said Richard Washburn of any nature whatsoever, and on attestation of his legal ownership of any present funds in his possession.

The foregoing had been the best that Andrew Sanders could do, and had been done under duress, that was true. None the less, if recorded, it put cloud upon the title of any man who might find currency in the possession of the aforesaid Richard Washburn, provided that Richard Washburn had any friends to carry the matter to any court of law. Such as it was, the possession of the document seemed to afford comfort to the mind of Richard Washburn, now about to die.

"Mine!" he said once more, and nodded his head feebly. They understood what he meant. He saw Annie read over the paper once again.

"Quick," he said, his voice a mere whisper. "Write my—will."

Annie Ballantyne ran to the little table and found there ink and a fountain pen, some paper—and she wrote Dick Washburn's last will and testament, as he dictated, word by word:

> In the name of God—Amen! Last will and testament of Richard Washburn, Teton County, Wyoming. I give all my property of every nature whatsoever to Annie Ballantyne, of Powder Basin, Idaho.
>
> Dated ——

He looked up at her. His mind did not cover the date. She wrote it in for him, so eager to catch his broken words that she failed to understand what her own name meant.

"Quick!" He reached out his hand, feeling for the pen. At a considerable distance below the writing he traced his name, "Richard Washburn." As might have been expected from those who knew the strange story of a strange man, his writing was not that of an uneducated man. He knew of the law, also; for he motioned for Stanley to sign as a witness.

Now all muscular control left him, his hand fell back and lay across his face, which was bluish pale.

"All right," he said. "Mine. Yours. Name of God. Amen!"

"He's dying!" Annie clasped her hands in terror, still unmindful of what had been the last rational intent of the man who lay there.

"Come away," said Stanley, gently, and led her now into the room beyond. Then he drew the edge of the blanket over the dead man's face.

He removed the hand bag to the table and poured out its contents. For the most part the bills were in packets. He began clumsily to count them over.

"It may be ten thousand dollars," said he; "in or around there. Great God, where did he get it?"

Battersleigh nodded toward the paper which lay upon the table. "There's the proof," said he, "unless there's marked bills there—which God forbid, for Annie's sake. 'Tis legal money, and a legal will—and hers. But why?"

Annie herself came out and stood by them. "What do you mean?" she said. "I never saw him before."

"Annie, dear," said the old man, kindly, "there's things in a man's heart that maybe not anybody knows sometimes. Ye did him a kindness, perhaps."

"No, no, I could not touch it. I'd never take it. What shall we do?"

"It don't look like there was anything you could do," commented Stanley. "This money don't belong to Sanders, and it can't be proved to belong to no bank. It don't belong to neither Wyoming or Idaho—and both them States is willin' to pay as much more for him now he's dead. Who does it belong to? It was his, and now he's dead. He's give it to you, and give it in legal form."

"Well, we'll take it for ye, Annie," said Battersleigh. "And we'll see it goes with the will to the courts for probate, and the courts will have to tell. For me, no blood money, either.

"And now," continued the old man, fumbling in the pockets of the coat which lay across the table, "at least he took nothing from my coat. But for these two letters I'd not be here. They're meant for you—I forgot them. Had I not forgotten it, all would have been different here this minute."

She looked at him indifferently, her mind dulled by all that had passed. "Letters? For me?"

"Two letters, both addressed to you, me dear. They're from Mr. Powers—ye know him? We're in his house now."

She made no reply, but took the letters and dropped them into the open bag.

"Now what shall we do?" Battersleigh looked to Stanley and motioned to the long figure under the blankets.

"This girl can't stay here any longer," Stanley declared. "She's got to go home. Will you wait here, Batty?"

"No," replied the sad old man. "And there is no coroner. We'll have to do something for ourselves."

"There ain't no burying grounds around the lake," said Stanley, "excepting up at my place. On the flat beyond my northwest corner is where folks has been buried around here for thirty or forty years. Maybe we'd better take him there. Annie, can you stand it to have him in the boat?"

With difficulty the girl controlled herself. "Don't let me see him," she whispered, shudderingly.

Ed Stanley by himself rolled up the long figure in the blankets and bound it about with bits of rope. He lifted it in his arms and started out in the darkness, walking rapidly from the hill to the boat. Annie felt the hand of Battersleigh summoning her to come. The latter picked up the little bag, which had been forgotten on the table.

Stanley stood deep in the water, after he had deposited his burden. "Sit here, Annie," he said, and extended to her a hand, so that she would face away from what lay long and dark in the boat.

As they stood, they heard beyond them in the lake the sound of a loud splash. The girl shrieked, and even Stanley started.

"What was that?" he exclaimed, looking up as he stood stooped at the rail of the boat.

"Nothing," said Battersleigh. "'Twas only me rifle. I'm done with it."

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK

Exploits of Beau Quicksilver

By FLORENCE M. PETTEE

IV.—THE HAND OF THE HYENA

"AMUSING little epistle! So gentle and solicitous for my health." Beau Quicksilver languidly tossed over the letter he had just received by special delivery.

The characters of the message were set down in ruddy red, of an insidious and exceedingly suggestive hue. The communication ran:

> YOU DAMNED DUDE:
>
> We are sending *this* letter *in red ink*. But we shall soon *write in your blood* to the gang the glad word that you've slipped your wind. We are going to get you, you dirty dick—you little dolled-up excuse of a tailor's dummy! *You can't shake us!* We've got *Jack Ketch* camping on your trail.
>
> We dare you to set foot outside your diggings this evening. We swear that if you put half a toe toward that carnival thing—*you're a goner.*
>
> THE HYENA.

Penn Markham, the noted detective's most intimate friend and sharer in his criminal exploits, studied the letter soberly.

"Funny move," he remarked, "putting you wise like this. With such a fly in your ear they can hardly expect you to leap for it. Naturally you won't budge with such a pleasant little reception committee awaiting you. Forewarned, you know—"

The splendid figure of Beau Quicksilver leaned forward in the great chair. The dude detective wore the costume he had

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most painstakingly designed for the carnival at the league that evening. It was already very dark outside. And Quicksilver momentarily expected his long, gray car to swerve up to the curb. For the motor, like its master, thrilled under the slightest acceleration of forthcoming cryptic adventure.

Beau Quicksilver was clad in the habiliments of the long ago. His satin doublet was of the richest scarlet. The crimson knee breeches gleamed with buckles set in brilliants. Buff hose ended in scarlet buckled shoes. And as was fitting for a dandy, a retainer in the court of Queen Elizabeth, Beau Quicksilver wore a high ruff at his throat almost touching his chin. At his side hung a sword in a marvelously chased scabbard. He might have been Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, as he sat there. Somehow the splendid raiment of bygone days seemed to become perfectly this modern knight of helpless law—of justice perpetually in distress.

"I should worry," smiled Beau Quicksilver disdainfully as he polished the tip of his scabbard with a lace kerchief. "Daring me to keep my engagement this evening because they know I make a fuss about such little things! Throwing a defy—a taunt to see if they judge me aright. Well, they do. For I shall attend the carnival in costume precisely as scheduled. *That* for their threats!" And he snapped his slim fingers.

A shadow fell over Penn Markham's fine face. "Quixie, old man," he worried ominously, "your decision is worthy of you. And I detest a coward. But aren't you rather overdoing the thing? Think what your—loss would mean to the Criminal Investigation Department—to public safety. They're going to get you one of these nights, Quixie, old boy."

Again Quicksilver shrugged his satin shoulders. His gray eyes gleamed like the brilliants on the gay buckles. "They may get me for a few hours, Penn. But that's all. I tell you, old top, the mind is quicker than mere muscle. So I always intend to be two mental jumps ahead of the criminal's muscular 'rough stuff.' Can a ten-ton truck catch a weasel?"

But the shadow still hovered over Penn Markham's clean-cut features. His further protestations against what he considered Beau Quicksilver's foolhardy quest were nipped by two blasts, followed by a short one, from the big-throated siren outside.

"Ah, there's the Greyhound," smiled Quicksilver animatedly, for so he had christened that long, lithe line of tempered steel.

Clicking his heels together the courtly figure made Penn Markham a sweeping bow.

"*Au revoir,*" called back the slim form as it leaped to the door. "Don't bother about Jack Ketch. The hangman's noose is a relic of medieval monstrosity. While I may wear the habiliments of other days, I am mentally accoutered with an entirely up-to-date twentieth century wardrobe."

"Adieu!" rejoined Penn Markham.

And Beau Quicksilver's gallant figure vanished from sight.

But his associate's clouded eyes continued to scan the leering, blood-red lines which made up the threat of the Hyena. The symbols there took on the character of something evil—until they seemed to sneer at him in letters of blood—Quicksilver's blood.

II.

Out in the river varicolored lights blinked from the darkness with knowing red, green, or blue eyes. Hardly a star answered the winks from the stream. For the night was dark. No moon sailed overhead.

In a disreputable old boathouse on the right bank of the river a group of men waited expectantly. But their eager glances set evilly in their hardened, ruthless faces. They reminded one of the boa constrictor stalking an antelope and licking anticipatory chops with its quarry already in sight.

A big man with bullock shoulders and a bullet head addressed them. He might have been the living prototype of Mephistopheles, done on generous lines, so diabolical was his expression. He tugged at the end of a bulbous nose, a habit he had when pluming himself on some damnable achievement.

"I tell you," he roared, "we've got him this time, the hell-hound of the bulls! Our mitts are already on him, the dude, the dolled-up dick! I know that letter of mine will fetch him, little cockatoo! It takes a strutting bantam like that to throw a fury

when he's sneered at and dared to anything. He'll run his two-by-two neck right into our noose all right, all right. We're going to get him this time, sure as hell!"

A rat-faced, pockmarked fellow of thirty or thereabouts jerked up a reptilian head flanked by bat ears. They had dubbed him Jack Ketch, not from the illustrious original, but because of his fiendish cleverness at strangulation. Jack Ketch, the second, had choked the life out of more than one victim. He bragged that he never used any other means for bumping off a quarry. Sometimes it was those hairy, strangler's hands of his, again a cord or some article from the helpless victim's clothing. This modern Jack Ketch was an ugly customer, albeit a valuable one to the Hyena and his gang. For he performed his killings swiftly, silently, without requiring special tools and without leaving ugly, identifying mementoes behind. So he had become the official executioner of the garroting gang.

The Hyena brought out his watch. It was a handsome jeweled affair, choked out of Sellers, the oil king, when they had waylaid the magnate in his limousine not long ago. The police were still rabid at their inability to get the gangsters or to bring to book any one to pay the penalty for Sellers's killing.

"Nine thirty," announced the Hyena. "It's time to be off."

With sharp, incisive commands he ordered three of the gang to man the high-powered motor boat, idly rubbing its nose like some sea hound against the temporary landing place they had chosen for the evening's initial business. Three others, including Jack Ketch, entered a big black roadster parked outside the isolated boathouse.

With an ominous, ruthless roar the big car shot away in the darkness. Not so much as a gleam of light told of its remorseless progress.

III.

THE elegant figure of Beau Quicksilver sat easily behind the wheel of the low-hung, racy roadster, that formidable Greyhound of justice which had leaped to the successful climax of many a hidden and weird mystery. With one hand lightly touching the wheel Quicksilver tore along over a dirt pike, soon to join the boulevard. The Greyhound's yellow orbs seared the darkness ahead like the eyes of some mythical monster.

Beau Quicksilver laughed to himself as though secretly pleased by some huge joke which kept amusing him. Once he had descried a dark object peering out at him from the thick hedge surrounding one of the isolated estates. The Greyhound had merely disdainfully taken the bit in its teeth and torn away with redoubled speed. Then as the powerful roadster careened around a curve on three wheels a blaze of light flamed from the road dead ahead.

Figures like black imps tore about the leaping fire. For in the center of the road a car was burning merrily. Tongues of flame darted out from the engine along to the body of the machine. One man held up an arresting hand to Beau Quicksilver.

With the expert application of the brakes, the Greyhound came to a quick pause. Throwing open the door, the anomalous figure covered with a long, dark coat leaped out into the circle of light.

"She's a wreck all right," wailed one man. "Can't do a thing. A beauty, too—almost new."

Then things began to happen. As though by magic the flames in the planted car died out. They turned black under the swift application of a couple of extinguishers. Something was flung over Beau Quicksilver's head. The duped detective was conscious of a sickening, nauseating odor. Then he knew no more.

IV.

ON a lonely island far down the river, the gang jostled one another. They craned eager necks anxious to lose no whit of the rare sport soon to unfold before them. For once the hardened criminals showed real excitement. They watched expectantly a certain pine tree which stood out stark and bleak on the rock promontory, backed by evergreens. Atop this spot a single object held every leering glance like a magnet. For a sturdy, right-angled branch from the bleak pine stretched a sinister arm seaward.

Attached to this tree tentacle was a rope with a most businesslike noose at its end. One almost fancied that the years had rolled backward a few centuries—that soon this modern pirate gang might sing out lustily in the argot of earlier buccaneer melody:

"Fifteen men on the dead man's chest,
Yo-ho, yo-ho, yo-ho—"

But the modern gibbet had not been erected for the taking-off of any old sea wasp. The waiting noose had been strung up by Jack Ketch's eager and painstaking fingers. It was his little joke, his entertainment for the edification of the gang.

For no less a prize than the hated dude detective, Beau Quicksilver, had fallen into their clutches but a few hours before. The slick sleuth had walked into the drawn snare like a blind bird, all unaware of the net spread for it. It was a gala evening—for the Hyena and his gang of law-breaking cutthroats.

Yet there was a certain spirit of restlessness rampant among them, despite the Hyena's dominating presence and the expert, cool movements of Jack Ketch. More than one head occasionally jerked toward the sea as if expecting some sudden apparition there. Other heads cast doubtful glances at the solemn, lowering sky. The whole atmosphere of the place breathed of the untoward. It was as though the elements themselves were already hanging a sable pall around that lonely ledge where the famous Beau Quicksilver should soon make his final exit.

There was a stir from the unlighted motor boat parked under the overhanging ledge just below the tree with its stark, sinister arm and its expectant noose. Two of the gang had been left on guard in the powerful craft. They emerged now, literally armed to the teeth. Between them walked a slight, satin-clad form. The men stood on tiptoe, peering at the figure dimly limned by the lanterns which the two jailers carried. They pressed a step nearer the gibbet before them.

Quicksilver's face was white. His shoulders sagged disconsolately. Somewhere in the fray he had lost his plumed hat. For once his thick, dark hair was unkempt and disheveled. The dandified figure appeared a mere stripling between the stalwart, muscular men who were piloting him. They were taking no chances with this slippery, elusive catcher of cunning criminals.

The tramp, tramp, tramp of the guard's heavy shot feet crunched over the rocks to the solitary, waiting pine on the ledge. The Hyena snapped out hoarse commands, posting his men at cautious intervals. Yet what he could fear on that isolated island ten miles from the mainland was problematical. His act suggested that the gangsters gaged Beau Quicksilver for a sleuth of no mean prowess, despite his light stature and his one hundred and fifty-five pounds.

The leering Jack Ketch stood ready with the noose. The slight, scarlet figure of Quicksilver stepped forth. His satin doublet, its disheveled lines hidden by the uncertain light, gleamed exceedingly rich against the darkness. His ruff stood out immaculately white.

Then, to the surprise of the waiting, expectant gang, Beau Quicksilver made them a graceful, mocking bow. He held one slim white hand against the empty scabbard dangling at his left side. Still retaining this position he uttered a few words to Jack Ketch. Something in his speech caused that bloodthirsty scoundrel to stare at him in amazement. Then he turned to the Hyena standing a bit behind him.

For a moment the Hyena frowned blackly. Then he threw back his beefy neck and laughed with a bull-like roar. Peal upon peal came from his brutish throat. Jack Ketch's ugly features lapsed into a sneering smirk. But Beau Quicksilver stood quietly, his head forward. He was the picture of dejection and resignation.

Then the Hyena strode forward. Peremptorily he raised a hand. A portentous quiet ensued. He bellowed out:

"What do you think! The damned dude is blubbering! He's made a death-bed wish. Begs a favor from *us* that he's been hounding for weeks. Knows he's a goner all right. And he's crying baby, the white-livered skunk! *What do you suppose he wants?*"

"What did the dirty dick ask for?" yelled one of the gang. "It's worth giving it to him just to pipe the blubber on his mug!

Beau Q. spilling salt gobs! Say, that's a sight next to his corpse!"

"What does he want?" shouted somebody else.

Again the Hyena flung back his thick neck and roared with ribald laughter.

"He begs to die like a gentleman—*like a gentleman*, do you hear? Wouldn't that make you throw a fit?"

Again the Hyena's uproarious mirth echoed about the place.

"What do you mean?" called out one of the gang. "Don't he want to be strung up like a side of beef? Ain't Jack Ketch's noose good enough for him?"

"No," answered the Hyena, still shaking with laughter. "The strutting dandy is fussy, you know. He's squeamish about the idea of rough, common rope against his tender throat. He begs us with tears in his eyes that the noose be looped about the high collar of his velvet jacket, that it may not touch or soil his lily-white skin! Oh, ho, ho, ho!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Ho, ho, ho!" echoed the gang. "The damned dandy! The fussy son of a fop! Ha, ha, ha! Ho, ho, ho!"

"What do you say?" cut in their leader.

"Sure! Let him die with the halter outside his velvet coat if he wants! He'll rest easier in hell, maybe. Sure thing. The blubber is worth it!"

With a mocking flourish Beau Quicksilver bowed to them again. Then he daintily dusted his lips with a fine kerchief which still remained in his otherwise empty pockets. He turned to the waiting Jack Ketch.

Darker and darker grew the sky. Low rumblings of thunder, like the moans of many of the gang's victims, came muttering in from over the sea. Livid lines of lightning occasionally rent the darkness. In them the gibbet stood out, stark and shadowy like an ugly black arm poised against the somber sky. All was hurry now to have the business at hand completed before the impending storm broke.

Jack Ketch took the rope. Beau Quicksilver himself, to the unwilling admiration of the gang, placed the stout noose in position about his velvet collar. His slight hands looked very delicate and white against the rich velvet. Even Jack Ketch could discern no tremor as the dude detective nonchalantly set the death noose around his own velvet throat.

There was a momentous pause. The thunder grew louder. The waves sounded an equally dramatic prelude.

Then the scarlet body of Beau Quicksilver shot out at the end of the stout rope. It jerked once, twice, spasmodically. Then it hung limp over the tossing waters.

The storm now broke in unleashed fury. The gang hastened around to a cave in the rocks which they frequently made their lair. The Hyena and his ruthless band of cutthroats were satisfied. At last that scourge of justice, Beau Quicksilver, had been done for! At last they had gained a respite from the scarlet figure swinging at the end of the rope.

Only Jack Ketch, a devotee to business, remained to see that life was entirely extinct before hastening after the gang. He settled down in the lee of a rock to protect himself against the great sheets of rain which now pelted the land. As a livid streak of lightning illumined the promontory, he say the bedraggled, limp object swaying there.

Then the official hangman of the gang hurried toward the sheltered cave. Vividly etched in his crime-soaked memory, he carried the picture of a sprawling, dangling, black shadow which had once been the dapper Beau Quicksilver.

V.

Some time later the moon came out, dissipating the heavy storm clouds. From within the cavern came the sound of ribald, drunken laughter. For the Hyena and his gang had stowed aboard the big motor boat a plentiful supply of firewater to round up the night's celebration. Jack Ketch alone remained partially sober. For this ruthless crook took his ugly profession seriously. Now, thoroughly dried and warmed with a generous libation, he hurried back to the gibbet he had deserted so precipitously when the storm broke. But several times before he climbed over the rocks to the death tree he puckered his brow. The moonlight now

bathed their island rendezvous with a ghostly, uncanny effulgence.

Once Jack Ketch stopped and muttered to himself. Then he frowned darkly and dashed his hands vehemently against his eyes, cursing the fiery liquid he had drunk. Still muttering to himself, he reached the rocky promontory. The sinister, swaying pine reared its stark head against the moonlit sky. The stars winked sneeringly. The sea chuckled and murmured. No wonder the elements proclaimed their satisfaction!

For against the moonlit sky the great branch on the death pine stood forth unmistakably. The rope dangled there plainly. *But it was empty!*

Jack Ketch reeled and blinked at the ugly, sprawling thing. Swearing foul oaths he stumbled forward. He put out a shaking hand as though to confirm what his eyes saw but could not believe. Yes. There was no doubt of it. The rope still swung from the tree arm. *But it had been neatly severed near the end!*

"Hell!" snarled Jack Ketch. "I—I'm seeing things! C-course he's here! Only he ain't!"

With a wide-eyed, backward glance at the empty rope Jack Ketch tore toward the gang. He burst in on them like a fury.

"He's g-gone!" he blubbered shrilly. "The damned dude's beat it! He's given us the slip with a noose around his neck. The bulls are here somewhere. Must be. They cut him down. They'll get us—any minute—"

His extraordinary words partially sobered the Hyena and the gang. The big leader tore out of the hiding place. He scrambled over the rocks, swearing, sputtering, barking his shins in his haste. The rest tumbled after him.

But when they came to the solitary pine only an empty rope dangled sneeringly before their very gaze. The moon smiled down on them grimly—knowingly.

"Somebody's got him!" roared the Hyena. "They dogged us here to cut him down and then land on us. The boat! The boat! Hurry! Let's all pile into the boat!"

Like a flock of loathsome buzzards the Hyena and his men tumbled down the rocks to the spot where they had left the high-powered craft.

Suddenly they stood back aghast.

For the motor boat they had parked there was gone—had melted away in the moonlight!

Only a starlit sea rippled mockingly before them.

VI.

BEFORE dawn streaked in, a police boat, piloted by a rakish, black power boat, tore away from the mainland to an island dotting the water some ten miles out. Crouched over the wheel in the forward craft sat a figure still clad in blood-red satin. As the moonlight touched the face of the man dressed so strangely for a criminal chase, one caught one's breath. For the debonair figure of Beau Quicksilver in the flesh sat steering the plunging craft at full speed ahead. Not so many hours before the same figure had stood, bowing mockingly and fearfully voicing a final request. Not so many hours before Jack Ketch himself had seen with an accomplished eye this same scarlet figure shot into eternity from the business end of a stout and entirely dependable rope.

Chief Cartman and Penn Markham strained their binoculars ahead.

"I fancy," murmured the chief, "that I can already decry a sinister, single pine rearing its black shape on the promontory."

Quicksilver flung back his dark head and laughed. One slender hand went to his throat. About the velvet collar a length of stout, knotted rope still clung with treacherous insistence.

"Pull off my left shoe, Penn, old man," he suggested above the pounding of the motor. "Under the sole is a flat, very keen blade. Just cut off this pleasant little memento, will you? I want to preserve it."

Reaching down, Penn Markham pulled off one of the buckled shoes. He plucked up the extra sole and brought out a flat length of gleaming steel. With a quick movement of his sinewy fingers, he severed the rope.

Then for the first time Beau Quicksilver opened his velvet jacket beneath its high-ruffed collar.

"Lend a hand here, Penn," he requested; "the thing fits like my skin."

As Markham complied, the chief held aloft a flash lamp. Under its rays the skin on Quicksilver's throat appeared very smooth and singularly motionless, unwrinkled as it was from under his ears halfway to the clavicle. Quicksilver pointed indicating fingers to his throat.

"So," he told Penn Markham, "and so."

As his assistant obeyed his suggestions two pieces of curved, exceedingly thin steel came away in his hands. They bore the exact shape of Quicksilver's throat and were painted flesh-colored.

"Ah," commented the slender sleuth, vigorously rubbing his own throat, "that fellow at Damascus, whom I visited when last abroad, is an incomparable artizan. His fashioning of this steel neckpiece according to my orders has not only spared my life, but put a gang of ruthless cutthroats at last within our grasp. I knew that I was just the proper bait to spring the trap on that garroting gang."

Chief Cartman suppressed a shiver.

"Pretty narrow chances you took, Quicksilver," he remarked. "It is a clever stunt and all that. And the capturing of this gang will be a great feather in your cap. But don't play with fire like that again. You're worth too much to us."

Beau Quicksilver shrugged as he turned to the wheel.

"Oh, it wasn't so risky," he observed slowly. "My most unpleasant moment was when I played the cry-baby stuff in order that I might adjust the noose myself. Not much of a chance in the dim light that that rascal Ketch would have noticed anything with my collar pulled down. But I couldn't afford to slip up. Rather uncomfortable dangling in mid-air for a bit, even with a steel neckpiece. 'Twas easy enough to reach into my shoe and yank out the bit of steel, then cut myself free. You know the rest."

The chief nodded. He flashed in code, swift commands to the police boat behind him. For the island now loomed up a sinister, isolated blot of black in a somnolent, silver sea.

The Hyena and his gang put up a desperate fight. But the reappearance of that redoubtable, mercurial Beau Quicksilver *in the flesh* dampened their ardor. And they were no match for the minions of the law, who outnumbered them, were sober, and who fired from well-armed boats or safe ambush.

Jack Ketch had performed his last rope trick. And the Hyena would no longer thirst for Beau Quicksilver's blood. The mystery master had again turned the trick. Rapierlike justice had once more banished bestial strength and criminal cunning.

Next Week: "THE GREEN RAJAH."

IMMORTAL

OF all the blessings Time has wrought,
In joy and sorrow laid,
Most grateful is my heart for this—
He never saw me fade.
He never knew my hair turned white,
Nor dreamed my eyes grew dim,
Nor watched the pallor creep and sprawl
On cheeks that glowed for him.
He never felt my marble throat
Lax, quivering and afraid;
He never marked my faltering steps,
He never saw me fade.

Margaret Severance.

The Doom Dealer

By DAVID FOX

Author of "The Super-Swing," "The Man Who Convicted Himself," etc.

CHAPTER XII.

THE UNSEEN GUEST.

PHIL brought the magnificent Francetta up with a flourish before the entrance of the Quincey House early the next morning. Then as his companion alighted he stared with all his eyes at the slender, dark-haired young woman in the smartest of fur-trimmed suits who came down the steps of the porch, glanced at him with a twinkle and then walked briskly off up the street.

"Holy cat!" he explained. "Get that, Luce? It was Ethel! She was always snappy, but gee! she looks like a—a thoroughbred!"

"I told you she could be depended upon to play the game." Luce had been gazing after the chic little figure, but now he turned. "You'd better wait here, Phil. There will be time enough for you to make arrangements at the garage and that hotel by the railroad after we've started the ball rolling with Dilworth."

Phil climbed down from behind the wheel and touched his cap, grinning.

"Yes, sir! I'm going to carry your bags in, though; wouldn't miss your grand entrance for a hundred cold!"

Mr. Quincey was duly impressed by the appearance of his new guest. When the latter made known the object of his visit there was a pronounced stir among the attendant loungers. Several volunteered their advice to supplement that of the proprietor, but the consensus was that Frank Dilworth was the feller to see.

The Francetta duly proceeded to the Dilworth office after Luce had engaged the best

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for February 24.

room the hotel afforded. He was soon stating his requirements to the stoutish, red-haired, dull-looking individual who regarded him with mild, yet shrewd, blue eyes, proffered a chair and a cigar and heard him through in apathetic interest as though millionaire investors were everyday callers at his shabbily appointed office.

Yet when Lucian had finished he arose leisurely, produced maps and specifications and took hold of the proposition with an executive ability which all but disconcerted his impractical prospective client. So this was the man who had given years of devotion to Miss Wyatt and then stood calmly aside when a stranger intervened!

Was he the type to relinquish the purpose of a lifetime without a struggle? For all his easy-going air there was strength and tenacity in his square jaw and firmly molded lips, calculation and intelligence in the broad forehead and widely spaced eyes and an underlying hint of swift passions beneath that calm exterior which would mark him as no pusillanimous rival.

Lucian felt out of his depth, but he listened with a gravely noncommittal air. When the name of Judge Tompkins was mentioned in connection with a certain plant he summoned up a convincing interest in it. In the Francetta they visited that and several other clamorous, grimy hives of industry. Noon found them entering the office of ex-Justice Junius Tompkins, attorney and counselor at law, in the venerable, graystone courthouse facing the public square.

Intent on maintaining his pose, Lucian failed to observe the rotund, opulently attired figure which loitered with sudden interest in the drugstore's window display, killed twenty minutes in the immediate vicinity and then followed them into the dusty, echoing corridors and knocked briskly upon Judge Tompkins's door.

A high, irascible voice bade him enter. Besides the visitors who had preceded him he found himself facing a gaunt, withered old man as bald as an eagle, with small, bright, protruding eyes behind gold-rimmed spectacles and a thin hooked beak which bore out the similarity.

The judge was sitting with a claw-like hand cupped over one ear and a smile of reluctant affability on his grim lips as he regarded the pseudo-millionaire, but his expression hardened at sight of the newcomer.

Henry advanced with a confidently assured air, however, and held out his hand.

"Judge Tompkins? My name's Cortland and I've come from Miss Wyatt, but I see you're engaged. I'll wait—"

"'Cortland?' By Jove, so it is!" Lucian turned with enthusiasm and grasped the hand which the judge had made no move to take. "How are you, my dear fellow! Marvelous results you obtained at my Paterson plant and the two in Trenton; increased our output twenty per cent in the first six months!

"Mr. Dilworth, Judge Tompkins, let me present Mr. Henry Cortland, the efficiency expert of whom I was speaking not five minutes ago in connection with any investments I may decide to make in this vicinity. I had no idea that you were sufficiently progressive here to realize the incalculable value of such services as his in these days of hustling competition and slack administration! Mr. Cortland, what brings you here?"

Dilworth acknowledged the introduction with matter-of-fact courtesy, but Lucian observed that his eyes had narrowed at the stranger's mention of Miss Wyatt and he had turned in quick interrogation to the judge.

"Heard of you, young man!" The latter eyed Henry in ill-concealed animosity. "Don't know what notion took Miss Wyatt to go ahead on her own hook and send for you without a word of complaint to me all these years about the way her mills were run. But I guess it won't do any harm for you to putter around so long as you don't interfere with men who knew their business when you were in short pants! Sit down."

"Young man!" Despite his fifty years, Henry felt youthfully abashed, but he smiled with patient indulgence.

"Ah—ha! That's just the state of affairs I'm here to change, judge. The methods of a generation ago do not under modern conditions bring the results—but with your permission I'll go into that another time."

He added the last hastily as the judge snorted in indignation. "Mr. Lester Ballyntine here can vouch for my system. I have Miss Wyatt's authorization to go over the Valley Brook plant this afternoon. I'll guarantee to open your eyes when I come to you with my report!"

"You will, hey?" the judge remarked dryly. "They've been tolerably wide open for nigh onto eighty year, but you go ahead. Miss Wyatt knows what she wants as well as any woman can."

"Stopping at the Quincey House, Mr. Ballyntine?" Henry turned to Lucian with a blandly inquiring air. "See you later, then. Good morning."

He made his escape, all but colliding at the door with a tall, stoop-shouldered, shabby individual who dropped his battered brief case at the encounter scattering papers right and left. They appeared to be covered with names, dates and disjointed inscriptions and stanzas of verse, but one page that swirled to the feet of the efficiency expert bore a seemingly meaningless series of letters which caused the latter to stoop and palm it swiftly, then assist the timidly apologetic blunderer to gather up his documents.

Ten minutes later in his room at the hotel Henry was regarding the lengthy cryptic message with the deepest interest and concern. Decoded it read:

> Miss A. W. saw stranger near market this A.M. recognized as driver of taxi that caused one smash-up N. Y. last week, probably rest also. Described as powerful, thickset, dark heavy face, greasy black hair, cheap perfume, fake diamond ring. Ethel been to customer named Litchfield hinted gossip Weir's joint. Cliff now, then Haynes Corners. Report tonight.

Below had been added evidently as an afterthought:

> Prowled all around outside san. grounds this A.M. Low hedge, no fence, no bars or shutters on windows. Two patients strolling about, no sign Rex. If nothing stirring tonight suggest interfere. Worried.

Henry felt worried also as he carefully destroyed the message. He had not expected any communication from Rex, but if George had only succeeded in catching a glimpse of him and they could know he was all right it would be some consolation. The news that the man who had imperiled Miss Wyatt's safety in New York in the effort to keep her from seeking the Shadowers' aid had appeared boldly in her home town showed that their adversary was gathering his accomplices for some further move. Henry would have given much for a conference with Rex. Undoubtedly he was there at the sanatorium or they would have heard from him. But how had he fared?

As a matter of fact Rex's immediate circumstances need not have occasioned his associates any anxiety. Under the cheerful, friendly suggestions of Doctor Weir he had taken some mild exercise in the gymnasium followed by a shower and a rubdown which left his healthy body tingling, although he was careful to simulate fatigue. Now before lunch he was resting in his room and mentally reviewing the details of the past two days, trying in vain to fasten upon any point which would reveal the establishment or its proprietor in a definitely questionable light.

True, he had been drugged on the night of his arrival, but he had warned the physician of his antipathy to opiates, at the same time displaying all the symptoms of one on the verge of a nervous collapse. It was not in itself a suspicious circumstance that an anodyne should have been administered to him without his knowledge to insure a few hours of healing slumber.

His room had been entered and his belongings removed, searched and then replaced, but it was quite within the bounds of possibility that the doctor might have merely desired to ascertain in advance of the thorough physical examination to which Rex was half-banteringly submitted on Sunday whether his new patient were in spite of his protestations a secret drug addict or not; Rex knew that the medicine with which Henry had dosed him to superinduce an appearance of nervous tension had contracted his pupils and endowed him with a yellowish pallor.

That was all the artificial aid which could be given him in the difficult rôle he had assumed. But Henry had coached him with infinite pains. Although Weir was

obviously puzzled by his muscular reaction and other symptoms beyond his control he had not for an instant been able to detect the slightest question in the other's attitude as to his own good faith. The drugging was not repeated nor was his room surreptitiously invaded again. Save for that weird cry in the night he would have been ready by Monday to depart.

But the memory of that cry in all its sharp anguish could not be exorcised. It echoed in his ears like a manifestation of something evil and sinister beneath the outwardly beneficent calm of the establishment. Rex knew that no mere nightmare on the part of one of his three fellow patients could have accounted for the poignant terror and agony in its animal-like accents. Only a creature in mortal distress or a human being in the throes of an insane paroxysm could have emitted it.

He allowed himself on Monday to be persuaded to join the doctor and his other patients at dinner. Maintaining his own attitude of neurasthenic semi-invalidism, he covertly studied the rest. Senator Underton's leonine head and dominant features were as easily recognizable from his recent widespread notoriety in the press as was the smug countenance of Avery Yates, pictured on innumerable soap wrappers for a generation, while Vanderpool, head of the great transatlantic line, had been pointed out to him more than once on occasions when he had himself emerged from the obscurity of his chosen career. The senator was evidently well on the road to recovery. Yates, although nervously excitable, appeared to be in full command of his mental faculties. Vanderpool's condition seemed the most serious of the three, but he roused himself from his apparently chronic melancholia to give courteous greeting to the new arrival. That cry could not have emanated from any of these three.

The watchman's flashlight had again been visible under the window on the previous night. But when on Monday evening the little group retired to their own rooms Rex watched until a distant clock struck one and still no spark gleamed forth from below. Utter silence reigned throughout the house.

He determined to explore, if possible, the two wings at the rear of the main building. He could not be sure that the cry had come from there; in his bemused state it might have reached his ears from the grounds or even the road beyond the gates. But he must learn if any one were held in forcible restraint beneath that roof in order to gage the possibilities underlying the doctor's seeming candor and geniality.

Possessing himself of matches he crossed to the fireplace and took from its hiding place in the crevice behind the mantel the little instrument of steel which he had concealed there on the night of his coming. Opening his door noiselessly he peered cautiously out in each direction. Low lights burned in wall brackets and a brighter glow appeared from the well of the staircase, but no one was visible and the silence remained unbroken.

Softly Rex stole down the hall. He paused for a moment irresolute before the twin doors which faced each other on either hand and then chose the one at the left. It was locked on the inside as he had anticipated, but a twist of the flexible, thread-like wire protruding from one end of the highly tempered file he carried turned the key and the door swung inward, revealing in the faint ray of light penetrating it obliquely from the main corridor a narrower hall with three closed single doors on either side. He closed the one by which he had entered and stood with his back against it listening intently.

Only a muffled snore from the room at his immediate right broke the stillness and after a period of breathless waiting he ventured to strike a match.

Its flickering light held high, Rex discerned a window facing him at the end of the hall. Passing the door behind which lay the audible sleeper he halted before the second. The knob turned beneath his cautious pressure, but the door did not yield. Stooping before his tiny flame expired he probed the keyhole with his wire. It met no resisting wards, however, and when he withdrew it and attempted to peer through the aperture only blank darkness prevailed within. Rex crept on to the third door next the window with a like result.

Two of the three across the narrow hall were locked also and no sound or faintest ray of light came from within. But the last door, as he retraced his groping steps, opened with the turning of the knob. He crossed the threshold and then halted once more, waiting tensely. No whisper of the lightest-drawn breath stirred the darkness before him, and, closing the door carefully, he ventured to strike a second match. It revealed merely a small bedroom—bare and deserted.

Retreating to the hall Rex turned toward the double door leading into the main corridor once more, wondering who the solitary occupant of this section of the house might be. He was about to venture into the corridor when the door of the opposite wing opened and Dr. Weir appeared, still fully dressed.

Rex drew back hastily, but it was evident that the physician had not seen him, for he turned and mounted the back stairs. A hairy hand and arm reached out from the shadows and closed the door which he had left ajar. The fleeting glimpse of the doctor's face showed that it was fraught with deep concern. The humorous quirk at the corners of his mobile lips was lost in a thin, straight line, and a troubled frown had gathered between his dark eyes.

But Rex gave him small heed, for in that brief moment, while the door of the right wing stood open, a voice had reached his ears which solved the riddle of that midnight cry.

"I'm dead, curse you, dead!" The strange words were uttered in a high, delirious tone and a cackle of hideous, insane laughter followed them. "Can't you let a dead man alone! I tell you I'm dea—"

The closing of the door abruptly silenced the dreadful, babbling voice. After waiting for an appreciable interval lest the doctor return and encounter him, Rex slipped back down the corridor to his own room. So the establishment housed at least one insane patient, after all!

Now in the cold, gray light of the wintry day as he relaxed, he felt that in no way could Weir be held under suspicion because of his discovery. It could have no bearing upon his own investigation.

Luncheon over, Rex was starting for his own room once more when William stopped him at the foot of the stairs.

"Excuse me, sir, but you're wanted on the long distance telephone. Doctor Weir sent me to tell you."

"'Long distance!'" Rex repeated half incredulously. This was no part of the plan which he and Henry had made! He turned and followed the butler with sudden misgiving. What could have gone wrong?

William led him to a small room at the left that he had not entered before. It was evidently the physician's private office for besides the roll-top desk, safe and filing case the room was lined with shelves upon which medical books were stacked.

Rex took in these details at a glance, for the doctor himself rose as he entered and indicated the telephone.

"Mr. Gideon Ormsby would like to speak to you, Mr. Parr."

Rex thanked him and took up the receiver with a swift sense of relief mingled with exasperation. Confound Gideon! What the devil was he butting in for? The doctor left the room. But what if the phone had extensions in other parts of the house?

"Hello! I say, hello! Is that you, Redmond?" It was unmistakably Gideon's voice and even from a far distance it shook with ill-concealed excitement.

"Hello, Gid! It is I, Parr," Rex responded guardedly.

"How are you, old fellow? Say, er—Redmond, something has come up in connection with your private affairs that you or your—your associates have got to know at once!"

Gideon was evidently trying to choose his words with care.

"No matter how *ill* you are, or perhaps because of it, this is vital, or I would not have disturbed you; can you understand? I know a lot more than—than you told me last week, more than you do yourself, and your crowd must be informed at the earliest possible moment in order to swing the deal!"

What could Gideon mean? Why had he emphasized "ill," and what could he, of all people, have learned of the activities of the Shadowers?

"I understand, Gid. Thanks for calling me up, old man, but that matter is entirely in the hands of my associates. You'll see one of them within a day or two," he replied in slow, measured accents. "I've dropped everything until these wretched nerves of mine are in shape again."

Surely Gideon would realize that he spoke for the benefit of a possible eavesdropper!

"You can't afford to drop this!" The retort came doggedly over the singing wires. "Your—your whole career is at stake, and if I don't hear from that associate of yours it will be necessary for me to run up there and see you. You weren't so ill that you couldn't talk to me last week, and you tell Dr. Weir that if I come I'm not going to be put off with any darned excuses about your rest cure. I'll get to you if I have to—to call on the State Department!"

Good old Gideon! Somehow he had made a discovery connected not with the Shadowers or their investigation, but with Weir himself! The conviction came in a flash.

"It won't be necessary to do that!" Rex raised his voice laughingly. "My nerves are still on edge, but I'm wonderfully improved. The doctor wouldn't object to my seeing you, for he urges me to come out of my shell and be more sociable with his guests here. I appreciate your intentions, old man, but I know you'll hear from my associates very shortly. Tell your uncle for me that I'm more than glad he recommended me here, and I am getting well fast. Good-by."

He hung up the receiver, then took it down cautiously and listened, but no faintest click of an extension elsewhere in the house came to his ears and he replaced it once more.

What could Gideon have learned? That violently insane patients were secretly concealed there? That was the only conclusion at which Rex could arrive.

Rex watched Dr. Weir covertly all the rest of the afternoon and evening, but he could detect no change in the frank camaraderie of Weir's manner. He went to his room at last convinced that his fears were groundless.

This was the night upon which Henry was to make his appearance, if possible. Rex hung a large bath towel from his window—the prearranged signal to indicate his room. The threatened storm had come at last in a driving cloud of snow, but the white cloth would be visible even through the flying flakes. Rex hastily wrote a message in code, got into his dressing gown and, turning out the lights, seated himself by the window to wait. The watchman passed twice upon his rounds, his dark form looming vaguely beneath the trees in the dancing pin point of light which he carried, but he did not trouble to flash it upon the windows. He had scarcely turned the corner of the house for the second time when another light winked quickly three times from the shelter of a clump of shrubbery that stood just below—outlining for a fleeting instant a rotund figure swathed in a huge coat.

Rex wrapped his note about a lump of coal from the scuttle beside the grate, lighted a match, and held it aloft in the window for a minute, and then as its sputtering flame died, he dropped the missive as near the clump of shrubbery as he could. The tiny light flashed out close to the ground, scurried about, halted, and then winked thrice and disappeared. The message had gone forth!

CHAPTER XIII.

UNSPOKEN TESTIMONY.

AT Miss Wyatt's Valley Brook mills, Henry had spent a bewildering afternoon inspecting with a knowing air the books and ledgers supplied by the astonished superintendent and walking gingerly about the clanking machinery.

In the evening he waited in his room until eleven, expecting that George would slip up to him to report. The pseudo-professor did not appear, however, and at last he left the hotel and proceeded down a side street away from the town square with his face huddled in his fur collar against the swirling snow storm which had set in at nightfall.

He could see only a few paces before

him, and did not think to glance back, so he was unaware of the sodden, freezing little figure stumbling along in his wake but keeping close to the closed shop fronts and high fence palings. The massive bulk of the Francetta, with all lights out, loomed blackly around a corner with Phil at the wheel, and the door beside him swinging open. Henry scrambled in thankfully.

"Why didn't you wait until the engine froze?" Phil demanded. "I didn't dare take a chance on keep her running without lights, and we'll have a hell of a time getting her going again!"

He turned on the switch key, pulled up the choke, and stepped on the self-starter, but as if in confirmation of his prophecy the engine voiced its protests in a series of whirring, snorting jerks. It was several minutes before the car rolled off down the snowy street—several minutes during which Ethel, loitering in the background, had time enough to make up her mind, dart forward and open the door of the limousine. Just as it started off she slipped inside and curled herself up on the floor, not knowing whither she was to be carried, but confident that it must be to where Rex Powell waited.

The storm beating upon the windows obscured the infrequent lights they passed, but she could tell when the car left the smoothly paved street and bumped over country roads with many a twist and turn for seemingly endless miles before they rolled out upon a level highway once more and stopped at last.

Henry alighted. After switching off the lamps, Phil descended also to move about and keep warm. Ethel could hear the thud of his feet as he stamped up and down beside the car. A daring impulse came to her. She had been unable to hear a word of the conversation on the front seat as they drove out. If Henry Corliss were to return alone and they went straight back to Millerstown, she would be no wiser than when they started. Waiting until Phil's footsteps sounded well in the rear of the car, she reached up and lowered the window just back of Henry's seat.

The waiting seemed interminable before Phil hurriedly jumped into his seat, turned the car with a swirl of the fine, dry snow, and switched on the lights as Henry climbed in beside him once more.

"Did you see him?" Phil asked eagerly. "Could you locate his window?"

"Fourth from the front on the left wall," responded Henry. "The white cloth was hanging out already as a signal, and he threw down this, wrapped around a piece of coal. Think it's safe to turn on the dash light?"

Ethel ducked quickly as the tiny bulb on the dashboard broke into a glow, and coincident with it she heard Phil's exclamation of disappointment:

"Aw, it's in code!"

"An easy one, though. I can do it in a minute without the key; George showed me how."

More than ten minutes passed, however, as they jolted and swayed over the deeply rutted road before Henry spoke again, and then it was with a change of tone.

"One of us has got to go back to town right away to see the feller who gave Rex that letter of introduction to Dr. Weir."

"Rex isn't in any—" Swift alarm sounded in Phil's voice, and Henry interrupted:

"No, and we're not to interfere with him, either, but I don't like it! I wish he was out of that hole! Golly, it's cold!"

Ethel flattened herself against the floor as much as possible and held her breath as Phil remarked:

"No wonder with that window open behind you! How in the world did that hap—"

The rest was lost in an indistinguishable murmur as Henry twisted about with a grunt and raised the window once more, but the next moment Ethel was on her knees, peering through the sash in time to see him stuff the message from Rex into his right coat pocket.

When the car rolled through the sleeping streets of Millerstown and stopped at the same corner as before, Henry alighted and stood for a minute's final talk with Phil. Neither saw that a door at the back on the far side opened and closed noiselessly and a slender figure scurried off in the storm. It paused just around a turn and waited, huddled against the tall fence.

Henry, floundering along with his head bent low, was astonished beyond measure to hear a timid voice in his ears.

"Dr. Corliss!"

"God Almighty, child, what are you doing out in all this snow?" He paused, eying her suspiciously. "This ain't obeying instructions, Ethel! What do you suppose the proprietor 'll think about your gadding around all hours like this?"

"I'm sorry!" Ethel faltered hypocritically through chattering teeth. "I saw you leave the hotel and followed you, but I lost you right here, and I—I've been waiting for hours, it seems to me. I'm just about frozen!"

She snuggled against him confidingly and Henry patted her shoulder.

"You oughtn't to have done it, child! Come on, I'll walk back almost to the hotel with you. You can tell me what you want to."

Ethel's disclosures of the gossip which she had gleaned from her new customers brought no fresh light to bear on the mystery, however. After seeing her safely into the hotel, Henry tramped about in the snow for a good twenty minutes before he ventured to enter it himself and proceed to his room. There his first thought was to reread the message from Rex, and he reached into his coat pocket, only to find it gone.

Meanwhile, in her own room, Ethel was smoothing the crumpled, coal-streaked sheet of paper upon her bureau top. It had been child's play to abstract the letter from Henry's pocket in that moment when she nestled so confidingly against him. It appeared at a first glance to be in the same code which she had used to communicate with George, but an attempt to solve it by that key proved fruitless, and she stood wrinkling her brow over the roughly printed characters before her:

Jr skrqhg pxvw vhh djhqw dw rgfh ngrxv vrphwklqj lqvdqh sdwlhqw vhfoxghg uljkw zlqj qrwklqj hovh vxvslfirxv gr qrw lqwhuihuh xqohvv vljqdo.

What could it mean? Henry had read it with comparative ease, and he said George Roper had shown him how. If the slow-thinking Doc Corliss could decipher it with such facility the key must not be far to seek. Ethel set herself industriously to her self-appointed task, but she found her thoughts wandering. Where had Mr. Roper been since noon?

The eccentric old professor's search for epitaphs had indeed taken him far afield that day. On leaving the courthouse after his encounter with Henry, he made his way to the dingy lunchroom near the station for sandwiches and coffee. Then he set forth for a certain cemetery two miles out in the country; but just before climbing the last hill he stopped at a bleak little farmhouse and knocked at the back door.

Cliff, in an artist's smock, and with his thumb thrust hastily through a palette adorned with blobs of suspiciously dry paint, opened the door and figuratively fell upon his neck.

"George! I thought you'd never come! You can tell Henry for me that I'm about fed up with this billet here!"

"What's the matter?" George dropped his brief case upon the table and advanced to the range. "Has your guest been obstreperous?"

"Not he!" Cliff lowered his voice. "Those boys from Pink-Eye's worry me, though. They are out of their element, and the country is getting on their nerves."

"Bring them up from the cellar then and talk to them for awhile," suggested the visitor. "I'm going down to put a flea in the strangely misshapen ears of their prisoner and see how he takes it."

"Send them up yourself!" Cliff retorted. "I don't want to look at that creature again—there's something positively loathsome about him!"

George found the two keepers moodily engaged in a game of cards on the top of an empty barrel, while the prisoner, with his hands and feet expertly bound, lay stretched upon a rickety sofa, glaring venomously at them.

"Hello, boys! Go on upstairs to my buddy while I tell this guy here some news about his friends."

George added, as they rose with alacrity: "Has he given you much trouble?"

"Ain't opened his trap, boss," the taller of the two burly rascals replied with a grin.

"Ike and me can make him, though, if you say de word!"

His reddened, rat-like eyes turned meaningly toward the furnace, and the poker, which lay beside it, but George shook his head.

"We won't try that yet, but we may come to it later. Here are some smokes for you from the big noise who's running this show."

He produced several packages of cigarettes from his pockets and the man called Ike remarked:

"T'anks, boss. Sing out if dat piece o' cheese gets funny."

"I guess I can handle him." George smiled slowly and the oddly colorless eyes of the captive blinked. "I'll call you when I'm through with him."

Pink-Eye's henchmen clattered up the stairs. George drew an upturned box close to the sofa, so that he could watch every change of expression on the flabby countenance.

"I've come here, my friend, to give you a last chance to talk and save your own skin. Guardini has—Florio Guardini, you know him! He and Mike and that fellow who called himself Cox up at Haynes Corners. They've split on you, do you understand? We've got them all!"

He paused, but the fishy eyes blinked steadily into his, and not another muscle of that flaccid face moved.

"Guardini says you've got some of the jewels still—the jewels that were stolen from Miss Wyatt. Where are they?"

The man's body twitched slightly and the loose lips contracted. After a moment George went on:

"That house at Haynes Corners was set on fire Saturday night—oh, we have the best of reasons for knowing you weren't there, but Mike and Cox say you put them up to it. They've told how you arranged it all, but what they don't know is that they *didn't make a thorough job of it!* They were in too much of a hurry to get away, and the neighbors put the blaze out. *You know what we found there!* Now are you ready to come clean?"

It was a shot in the dark. The pale eyes shifted as though seeking escape from the keen ones boring into them. The stout cords strained as the man's shoulders heaved, but still he did not speak.

"They've framed you, don't you get it? They're going to say you planned it all a year and a half ago! Everybody else is going to be left out of it and you're to be the goat!

"Now we know just where you come in on this game, and how little you've been getting out of it. We know that you were the one who was acting under orders, but we can't prove it and help you unless you'll open up."

George's tone had grown deeply persuasive. "It's every man for himself, now that the game is up, and we can get you off light if you'll tell us a few things we want to know. How about it?"

The unhealthy greenish pallor of the man's face was slowly overspreading with a dull red, and beads of perspiration started under the long wisps of tow-colored hair straying down upon his forehead. Yet he waited, his blinking eyes fixed once more upon George's as though magnetized.

"How did you know that Miss Wyatt was coming to New York last week to get us? Who sent you to trail us and report to Haynes Corners? Was it the man living there?"

George rapped the questions out sharply just as a sudden inspiration came.

"Mike went to New York on Monday—what for? Was it to wreck Miss Wyatt's taxi when she tried to reach us? Was he the driver of that other car?"

He had recalled in a flash what Cliff learned in Haynes Corners on the previous Sunday about the reckless driving of the man known as Mike, and his absence coincident with the attacks on Miss Wyatt in New York. She had recognized her assailant in the swarthy stranger loitering about Millerstown that very morning, and George ventured on a bold stroke.

It went home. The dull eyes gleamed in swift, inadvertent affirmation, and the man's lips parted. Then he compressed them and turned his face resolutely away.

"Who stole Miss Wyatt's jewels a year ago last June? They say it was you, but we know just what you had to do with

that. They think Miss Wyatt only came to us about the robbery, but she didn't, my friend—she came to find out *how Ogden Ronalds died!*"

He halted as the captive turned his head with a jerk. George had gone farther than Henry's instructions, but success emboldened him, and now he leaned closer.

"It wasn't heart disease, even if it did fool the coroner — it was murder! You didn't kill him, but you know who did and why!"

George spoke slowly, with measured significance. "Tell me, and I'll set you free now. I'll get you out of the country! When the others hear the real charge that's going to be brought against them they'll frame you for the round trip unless you come across to us. You know that you don't trust them! I've told you how they have double-crossed you already, and this is your only chance—"

The words died on his lips, for the man's face had become suddenly distorted and his body writhed. Was it in rage against the supposed traitors? Would resentment and fear break the seal of his silence?

Then all at once George saw that he was laughing! The grotesque countenance was twisted in a paroxysm of diabolic mirth, the loose mouth slavering, and rolls of flesh closing the eyes to mere slits while his shoulders shook convulsively.

"Cripes, you're a raw dealer!" The words came at last with a jeer. "I been double-crossed, have I? Somebody snitched on me? If you're so wise, what's my moniker? Tell me dat, mister! I dunno who's been handin' yer dat line o' bunk yer pulled, nor any o' de guys you're spielin' about, but dey sure been givin' yer de needle! Quit stallin' an' call me by my name if you can!"

It was a direct challenge, and George could not meet it. He rose with a shrug.

"Never mind your name, my friend. I gave you your chance, but you've passed it up, and now you'll have to take your medicine. There's somebody else who hasn't talked yet, but he's come back, he's here to tell what he knows—the man with the scar! You didn't bargain for that, did you?"

He added the question triumphantly, for the other's derisive smirk vanished as suddenly as though an obliterating hand had passed across his face, leaving it blank of all expression. Only the eyes, blinking rapidly, stared into those of George with a shade of unmistakable fear. Then abruptly he turned his head away and his eyes closed.

Alone once more in the kitchen with Cliff, George maintained a noncommittal reserve as to the result of his interview, and the former at length lost patience.

"I don't believe you got a word from him or you wouldn't be so confoundedly secretive! You can tell Henry I'm sick of this job!"

"If you want something to do, my dear Cliff, I've brought work for you right in your own line that ought to occupy you for quite a while."

George chuckled, and going to the table, he opened his brief case, taking from it a fat sheaf of papers.

"Ethel gave me these for you. She hasn't heard of the anonymous letters so she's playing no favorites. If she keeps on at this rate you will have the writing of everybody in the town! You'll find Miss Wyatt's own household represented there—the cook's grocery list, the housemaid's receipt for a package, a postcard the laundress addressed, and even the flyleaf torn from a book inscribed by Mary Jane to her employer at Christmas. Of course I had to take them with the rest, which Ethel filched from half a dozen of the best families. If her activities are ever discovered, may Heaven help us! I'm off, now. When is the next train from the junction?"

"To Haynes Corners?" Cliff looked up from his new specimens. "George, I wish you'd try to find out who mailed that anonymous letter from there on the fourth of November. That's only a fortnight ago, and if the postmaster remembers you ought to be able to get it out of him, for he's a talkative old codger. Here, you may take the envelope along with you, if you like. See how mudstained and crumpled it is?"

"I don't know what luck I'll have." George accepted the envelope somewhat dubiously. "I've got other work in Haynes Corners, but I'll try."

"You can get a train within the hour," Cliff urged. "Come back by way of the junction and I'll have some dinner waiting for you. Perhaps I shall have some news for you, too. You'll return later?"

His tone was so undeniably wistful that George agreed, knowing Henry would be busy for the rest of the day and evening. He set out for the junction with an idea borne of one of his own prevarications fast taking definite form in his mind. He had told the captive in the cellar that the house at Haynes Corners was saved from destruction by fire, and the shot told. Suppose it proved to be not wholly a fabrication, after all?

Obviously the blaze would not have been started if the house and those two outbuildings had not contained damaging evidence which could not readily be carried away or disposed of in any other fashion. What if the ruins still harbored a clew which would lead to the truth about Ogden Ronalds's death?

CHAPTER XIV.

BENEATH BLACKENED TIMBERS.

THE solitary passenger who alighted from the train at Haynes Corners did not enter the station, but struck off directly up the village street to the post office. A group of small boys, evidently on their way home from school, were hanging about the door in vociferous discussion as to the probable thickness of ice out on the pond. The empty rows of letter boxes within proclaimed that whatever mail had come to the little hamlet had already been called for.

George strolled about, examining the faded notices tacked upon the walls, and then approached the stamp window from the other side of which a grizzled little man was regarding him curiously through steel-bowed spectacles.

"Expectin' a letter?" he asked sociably. "Couple come here fer strangers in the last day or two, an' I be'n a holdin' 'em, but I reckon none o' 'em's fer you. You don't look like a furriner."

"Dyed-in-the-wool Yank; but my father's pa came from the other side," George said quickly. "Mighty few folks would guess I had Italian blood, to look at me!"

He had recalled all at once that no one knew Mike's last name, and Cox was in all probability an alias, while their solitary visitor had talked with an accent "like a road mender." It would do no harm to lay claim to at least one of the letters, if he could, on the bare chance that it was intended for one of that trio. The postmaster reached up into a cubbyhole and drew forth two envelopes, holding them so that the address on the topmost was plainly legible though upside down. George's keen eyes read it at a glance.

"Eyetalian? Nope, dunno's anybuddy'd take you fer that." The postmaster rubbed his chin reflectively.

"My name's Colucci, though," George chuckled. "Vito Colucci—mouthful, isn't it?"

"Then here's your letter, Mr. Co-lucy." The postmaster thrust it through the window. "Stayin' here to the Corners?"

"Going away again to-night," George replied hastily to forestall further questioning. "Know anybody in Millerstown? I've got a cousin who's gardener for the richest woman there—richest woman in the whole county, I reckon. Did you ever hear tell of Miss Arabella Wyatt?"

"'Hear tell o' her!'" repeated the postmaster. "They ain't nobuddy in these parts didn't hear tell o' that weddin' last year that didn't come off because the bridegroom dropped—"

"My cousin wrote me about it and sent me the newspapers," George interrupted, but the postmaster was not to be stopped now.

"By crikey, that was the strangest thing ever happened anywheres round! Some folks from here went over ter see what they could o' the buryin', which was right next ter the big Wyatt plot in the cem'tery, an' they say Miss Wyatt looked like death herself! That reminds me!" He broke off and rubbed his chin once more. "A letter got mailed ter her from her t'other day, an' there was somethin' kinder funny about it."

"Was there?" George asked with well-

simulated indifference. "I guess rich folks like her get lots of funny letters."

"I mean about how it come ter get mailed from here," the postmaster amended. "The Kennedy youngster out there brought it ter me—him with the red mittens on. He said a feller in an ottermobile stopped him on the road from the pond—it leads inter the Millerstown turnpike, too—an' ast him ter post it. The feller said a woman had give it ter him seven or eight mile back. Funny, ain't it? The woman must a be'n nigher ter Millerstown herself then ter the Corners, here."

The Kennedy youngster—and "Old Man" Kennedy had been a neighbor of the vanished Cox! George thrust the letter into his pocket unopened and pulled his coat collar up about his ears.

"Seems strange, but you never can tell what notion a woman will take," he remarked. "If any more mail comes for me in the next three days I'd be much obliged if you readdress it to Millerstown to me in care of Miss Wyatt—that's the way my cousin gets his."

"All right." The postmaster nodded. Cold, ain't it? Reckon we're goin' ter have some snow."

George agreed, and took his departure hurriedly, for the group of children about the door had dispersed. Far down the street a small boy, with red mittens clutching his school bag and books, trudged on alone. George kept carefully in the rear until the last scattered houses of the village had been left behind and only the bleak country road stretched before them. Then a few strides brought him up to the sturdy little figure.

"Hello, sonny! Hear you had a fire somewhere around here last Saturday," he remarked. "The postmaster just told me so. Do you know where it was?"

"Next ter our place," the boy replied wonderingly.

"Is it far out?" George adopted a confidential tone. "You see, I sell fire insurance, and there's no time for getting folks to take out a policy as when they've just had a fire. But I guess you don't know what insurance is."

"Reckon I do!" his small companion affirmed promptly. "Pa's got every kind they is, an' ma says it's keepin' us poor. But you won't sell none ter the feller that lived there, 'cos he's gone away. Didn't the postmaster tell you, mister?"

"No, but he told me something else!" George laughed. "It was about that letter the man in the automobile gave you to mail a couple of weeks ago and you forgot all about it—"

"How'd he know that?" the boy interrupted, open-mouthed. "I didn't fergit it, neither; I dropped it, an' the mud wouldn't come off, an' I was scared. I was gonna tear it up, an' then I guessed mebbe I'd better mail it, after all, 'cos the feller might come back."

"Didn't you know him, sonny?"

"Nope. Ain't never seen him afore, but he gimme a quarter. He said a lady walkin' in the road a ways back had ast him ter post the letter fer her at the Corners." He shifted his school books, and added, with the evident desire to change an unwelcome subject:

"You'd ought ter seen that fire, though! Golly, it was fine! Pa told me not ter come, but I sneaked out after him, an' she was just a-blazin' ter beat time! It looked first like the house was all lit up inside fer a party, only redder 'n any lights w'd be, an' then the flames come shootin' up through the roof an' she fell in an' then the walls. An' folks said mebbe Mr. Cox done it himself."

"Why didn't your constable get after him?" George asked. "If he was insured—"

"He wasn't, an' besides he'd gone." The boy stopped to kick at a frozen hummock of mud in the road, and then went on. "I heard pa an' some other folks talkin' about it, an' they said if he wanted to burn it down 'twasn't nobody's business. He was funny, anyway."

"How do you mean?" George opened his coat to reach into his change pocket. "I'm going to see him about insurance when he comes back, and I'd like to know what sort of a fellow he is. Tell me about him."

He drew out a half dollar, and the boy's eyes glistened

"Ain't much ter tell, mister. He didn't want nobody on his place, an' he used ter come out all covered with whitewash and yell at us when we got in the orchard, but he didn't chase us ner throw things the way Mike done. Mike was the hired man—"

"'All covered with whitewash'?" George repeated, laughing. "He couldn't have been whitewashing all the time! Where'd he come out of—the house or one of the barns?"

"They wasn't but one, an' that's still there. He'd come out of the house or one of the two outbuildings that was burned; he kept his ottermobile in the other. It was whitewash or plaster or somethin', mister, an' his clothes was all streaked with it, 'cept when he went out daytimes."

"I'll bet you kids have been climbing all over what was left from the fire," George remarked. "What did you find?"

"Betcher we ain't!" his informant retorted with emphasis. "We got larruped the first time fer gettin' our pants tore an' covered with soot! I found this, though."

He pulled off his mitten and fumbled beneath his sweater to get at a shabby pocket, drawing forth a small, smoke-stained white object. "Reckon he must 'a' had some images like what's in the graveyard stored away in that outhouse, an' they got broke when the roof fell. They's an awful lot of pieces, only this was the biggest. Purty, ain't it?"

The treasure which he regarded with such evident admiration was a chipped plaster cast of a human ear. George took it from his hand and turned it over, disclosing an oddly shaped concavity in the back; a cuplike hollow sharply gouged out as though to fit over a protuberance of some sort. His pulses leaped, but his tone did not quicken as he observed:

"It would make a dandy paper-weight for my desk. Give you a dollar for it, sonny, besides this fifty cents."

The boy looked up at him half incredulously.

"A dollar! Honest? Golly, that 'll be enough, with what I got put by, fer new skates! Take it, mister. I—I could get you some more pieces if pa don't ketch me —only they'll be littler ones."

George shook his head as the money dropped into the boy's mitten.

"Don't want any. What else did you see besides the broken images?"

"Nothin' there, but what's left of the ottermobile is in the other outhouse under all them burned-up boards. The roof fell in on her, but Zeb Keefer an' I crawled underneath, an' he looked her over. He helps his big brother a lot down ter the garage. He says it was the funniest ottermobile ever he seen."

"Wasn't it just a flivver?"

"Nope, though it looked like 'em goin' along the roads. Mr. Cox didn't never have it ter the garage over at the Corners. Zeb says he seen a lot of cheap ottermobiles there fixed up so's you'd think they cost a sight more, but he ain't never come acrost one afore that was made ter look's if it was nothin' an' yet c'd go like sixty. He says that engine must 'a' be'n able ter beat anythin' in the county if they'd ever let her out! Golly, there's pa lookin' fer me! He told me ter get hom an' split kindlin's."

"Run along, sonny," George advised. "Tell him if he wants more fire insurance than he's carrying, the postmaster knows where to find me."

The boy scurried in through the gate of a littered farmyard and around the dilapidated house just in time to avoid a stoop-shouldered man with long chin whiskers who had come out upon the porch.

A stone wall separated the yard from a cornfield. Beyond lay a dun-colored pasture with a half-frozen brook flowing sluggishly beneath bare trees. Then came a high fence topped with barbed wire. Within the inclosure a mass of blackened timbers rose from the square pit of what had been the foundation of a house. On the far side two charred heaps showed where the smaller outbuildings had been.

Twilight was settling down, and there was a hint of snow in the air as George turned in at the open gateway. He skirted the larger ruin and made for the nearest of the two charred heaps. A twisted tin roof sagged down over the débris. Gingerly feeling his way, he crept step by step beneath it until he came to the tortured wreck of a car.

The body had been burned completely away, and to his untutored gaze the warped engine seemed merely fit to be scrapped; but he whistled as he counted the cylinders. No amount of camouflage could have concealed its tremendous horse power save from the farmers thereabout. It was evident that it had been maintained for some sudden emergency. If that anticipated emergency had been a possible quick get-away, why had it not been used? The separate departure of Cox and his hired man with their specious excuses had been clumsily managed. George shook his head as he approached the remains of the second outbuilding.

Its walls had undoubtedly been thinner than those of the improvised garage, and the roof merely boarded over, for little more than a mound of ashes remained between the half-consumed uprights which rose like jagged, blackened fangs. The twilight was fast deepening to dusk, but through the gathering shadows George caught the dull glimmer of smoky white fragments half buried in the wreckage. Taking a long stick, he prodded several of them out and thrust them into his capacious coat pockets. Then he turned back to the débris of the house.

The cellar doors were gone, and the steps led downward into a dark, yawning cavern beneath a precarious roof of massed black timbers, upthrust as though flung there by some mighty tide. It seemed inconceivable that anything could have remained in that huge furnace unreduced to cinders; yet, after a moment's hesitation, George plunged down the opening. For ten minutes or more his flash light winked here and there through the interstices of the ruins. When he emerged it was only to hurry to the barn, from whence he returned bearing a length of coarse sacking and a coil of rusty wire, to descend once more into the cellar.

Nightfall came, and with it the first light fluttering flakes of snow, which soon settled into a driving cloud. Alone in his kitchen Cliff paced moodily back and forth, a prey to one of the fits of nervous depression which still assailed him in grim reminder of his last term in prison. The specimens of handwriting brought to him from Ethel lay neglected on the table, but a dinner which had obviously come out of cans was simmering on the back of the range, and he watched the clock anxiously.

Seven struck, however, and eight, and still there was no sign of George. Cliff was giving him up in despair when footsteps stamped up on the little porch and the door was flung open, disclosing his tall, gaunt figure encrusted with snow.

"Lord, what a night!" he exclaimed, depositing a weighty bundle carefully on the floor and pausing to beat the white flakes from his coat. "I didn't want to take the train back from Haynes Corners, so I walked to the first station this way, and it was three long miles."

"Well, don't stand there and melt all over my clean floor!" Cliff admonished with lively solicitude. "Come over here on the oilcloth in front of the range, where I can mop it up easily. Housekeeping's no joke."

George obeyed, carefully removing his sodden, shabby coat. While his host commenced to set dinner upon the table he warmed his hands, shivering.

"There are times when I wish I had not dressed the part of a poverty-stricken old professor with such realistic exactitude," he remarked. "That threadbare coat— Hey, look out for it, Cliff! You'll break them!"

"Break what?" Cliff demanded, weighing the garment speculatively. "Have you got rocks in these pockets? Ugh! It's all covered with grime and smut; and look at your face! Where the devil have you been?"

"Digging around in the ashes of Cox's house, and boy! my hunch was right. Do you remember when I gave Henry that false ear I had taken off our friend below, and Henry said he hadn't worn them until he trailed you and Luce the afternoon before because he didn't have them, that they were brand new? They must have hurt him, too, and that's why he didn't wear them when Ethel saw him on the avenue that morning, but he'd clapped them in place later before I nabbed him in front of that telephone booth. Here's the cast from which they were made!"

George's long arm dived into one of the

pockets, and he produced the plaster ear he had purchased from the Kennedy lad. "And the fellow who made them was Cox! They're the queerest gang of crooks I ever heard of, Cliff.

"Cox is a sculptor, and by no means an inferior one. I have a lot of his paraphernalia over there in that bundle which I dug up out of the ruins of his cellar, and in a container I found a mass of that waxy stuff the ear is made of, all melted and covered with soot. When I scraped the top off it was flesh-pink underneath. I brought a gob of it along to show to Henry. How do you suppose a fellow of his sort, an artist, came to be mixed up in this business with that roughneck slugger Mike and our earless freak?"

"Hard to tell." Cliff shrugged. "You've found the nest, George, and it was good work, but the birds have flown."

"Not far," George retorted significantly. "They burned up their car instead of using it to make their get-away. The only reason there could be for that was that they were going to stick around the neighborhood, and there was nowhere to hide it where its presence wouldn't be compromising. It was a racer disguised as a flivver, and easily recognized.

"We've got one of the precious trio safe under guard; I know Mike was in Millerstown this morning, so the only one to be accounted for, except that visitor of a year and a half ago, is Cox himself."

"Did you find out anything about that anonymous letter mailed from Haynes Corners?"

"I talked with the kid who mailed it." George recounted in detail his conversation with the postmaster and the boy.

Cliff sorted his papers idly as he listened. "So it was a woman—a woman from Millerstown—who gave it to that motorist to mail for her at the Corners?" he commented, his eyes upon the sheets spread before him. "That ought to eliminate a few of these and the others which you brought me from Ethel yesterday, although most of the specimens she has collected are in the handwriting of women—"

He paused, staring down at a page which he picked up slowly and held near the lamp with hands which trembled all at once with excitement.

"What is it?" George moved around the table toward him. "You haven't found—"

"I don't know. I can't be sure. I—I'll have to see Miss Wyatt, and ask her some questions about the people whose handwriting you brought to-day, before I could hazard a direct accusation." Cliff gathered the papers together, his face a study. "Henry can arrange it. Tell him it's absolutely imperative."

"But Miss Wyatt—I don't see how it can be done—"

"He must see that she is alone to-morrow evening, with no other callers, but I want Henry and as many of the rest of you as can manage it to be present, too. She must say nothing to any one about our coming, for only after my talk with her shall I be prepared to act."

"And you accused me this afternoon of being secretive?" George reminded him. "What about our prisoner down below?"

"We'll have to take a chance and trust Pink-Eye's boys for a few hours," Cliff responded firmly. "I don't know that we'll be any nearer to the murderer of Ronalds—if it was murder—but the writer of those letters knows something, and, scandal or no scandal, I mean to get at the truth. Tell Henry it must be to-morrow evening without fail."

CHAPTER XV.

TWO ON THE TRAIL.

THE storm ceased with the coming of day and the white blanket which had covered the ground melted rapidly, rendering the roads almost impassable. Lucian and George each found notes under their respective doors on awakening. The former, together with Phil, lost no time after an early breakfast in starting out with the Francetta along a little frequented country road through a sea of slush.

They had passed the last of the mills and clustered cottages of the operators and entered upon a region of meager farms, their sordid dilapidation softened by the glistening mantle of snow, but the roads grew

worse and Phil lifted up his voice in lament at the indignity to his beloved car.

"What does Henry think Fanny is; a snowplow?" he demanded. "You and Henry are supposed to be acquainted with each other—why couldn't he have talked to you in the hotel instead of making a date away out here! Gee, here's a graveyard! This is one George missed!"

But George hadn't. His tall form loomed just beside the rickety gate of the old burying ground and he made impatient signals for them to stop.

"Didn't expect to see you fellows," he remarked, climbing in with an utter disregard to the damage wrought by his sodden boots. "Where's Henry?"

"We thought we should meet him before this," replied Luce as "Fanny" started once more with a swirl of muddy snow from under her wheels. "He must have left the hotel at daybreak, for our esteemed doctor is not built for heavy going and only some important development could have made him change our plans. Rex is all right, thank heaven. Phil drove Henry out to the san last night in the storm and Rex threw a note in code down to him from his window. Phil says Henry didn't read it to him, just announced that one of us would have to go back to town immediately. There he is, now!"

Henry had been seated gingerly on a newspaper spread over the stump of a tree by the roadside. His erstwhile immaculate attire bore mute evidence of his struggle through the mire, but he greeted the others briskly and his small eyes were alight with eager purpose.

"Leave the front windows down, Phil, so that you can join in the conference, and drive slowly in any direction as long as you keep off the highroad," he directed. "Let's get right down to business. Luce, what do you think of Dilworth?"

"I'm no student of human nature like George here, but Dilworth is shrewd enough for all his sleepy air and country manners," Lucian spoke guardedly. "From what we know his whole life has been wrapped up in Miss Wyatt. It doesn't seem consistent that he should have stood aside so meekly last year and permitted another to cut him out. But on the other hand he's the matter of fact type who would fight straight from the shoulder if he fought at all. There's nothing subtle about him that I could discover. If Ronalds was done to death it must have been in some devilishly subtle way. If he'd been decoyed somewhere and shot or brained Dilworth might have been guilty, given his incentive, but I can't imagine him planning a campaign of slow poison. And how else could Ronalds have been killed? That tragic scene in the church was too bizarre, too theatric, to have originated in his single track mind."

"Then it isn't likely that you can help the case by stalling around as a prospective mill proprietor any more just now, Luce. That's why I got you out here. I want you to take the first train back to New York and call at the apartments of a gentleman named Gideon Ormsby," announced Henry. "He's that nephew of old Luther who got Rex into the san and he phoned yesterday that he has important news."

"I shall have to go to him as Lester Ballyntine." There was a peculiar expression on Lucian's face. "You see, I met him once under that name while following my former vocation, and I have reason to know that he remembers me."

"You didn't—he doesn't suspect—" Henry paused.

"Only that I am an art connoisseur and collector," responded the other with dignity. "Quite a respectable cloak, my dear Henry. If what he has to tell me doesn't seem of immediate value to our case may I take a day or two to look up Florio Guardini before I return? It's a mere chance that he had anything to do with the duplication of those jewels, of course. We know they were stolen before Ronalds's death, so the two may not be connected in any way, but it's worth trying."

"Use your own judgment, only keep in constant touch with me—I may happen to need you in a hurry." Henry leaned forward. "Phil, did you get any trace of that man with the scarred face? Your hotel is the only one in town except the Quincey House, and if he stopped anywhere it must have been there."

"It was," Phil affirmed. "After I put

the car up last night I went home and found the proprietor having a sociable little time all by himself with some bootleg poison one of the section hands had given him. I didn't have to grease the slides to get him going. The guy wasn't a foreigner, according to him. He'd called himself Edward Fenn and showed up for the first time a week ago last Sunday."

"'The first time?'" repeated Henry. "That was the day before Miss Wyatt came to New York to consult us! The proprietor doesn't recall him around the Railroad Hotel about a year and a half ago, then?"

"No. He'd never seen him before. Fenn had only a shabby old bag with him, but he seemed well supplied with money and paid for his room a week in advance. He was a grouchy kind of a customer and kept to himself. He was orderly enough except one night when some nosey hick in the office asked him how he'd got that scar on his face. He looked like murder then, and the proprietor thought a fight was going to start, sure, for Fenn reached back quick as though he was going to draw. But he wasn't heeled and he turned kind of foolish and went on up to his room—my room now, by the way.

"He beat it bag and baggage late Friday night, and though he said he'd be back he hasn't shown up since." Phil laughed. "Hope he don't; if he comes heeled this time and is quick on the draw, for I've got something belonging to him."

"You!" Luce exclaimed. "Why didn't you tell me? What is it?"

"I was saving it for Henry." Phil edged the Francetta around a turn with one hand and reached into a pocket with the other. "I've been in worse dumps than that, but I saw when I registered there yesterday that my room hadn't been cleaned in many a day. When I heard that guy had slept in it just before me I left the proprietor to his firewater and went up to have a good look around. I didn't find anything but dirt at first. Then under a loose corner of the carpet I came on this!"

He extended his hand and the others saw that in its palm lay an old-fashioned band of plain gold.

"A woman's wedding ring!" exclaimed George as Henry took it. "How do you know Fenn had it?"

"Aw, look at the inscription!" Phil retorted. "I don't think he hid it there. He must have dropped it when he was packing in such a hurry to get the next train after coming face to face with Miss Wyatt on the station platform. Maybe he didn't know he had lost it until he was on his way. Can you make it out?"

"'E. F. to I. B., Sept. 4th, 1910,'" read Henry. "It's as clear as though it had been engraved yesterday and the ring itself isn't worn or scratched. So there's another woman in this case! I wonder what connection there is between the man called Fenn and those two who lived in that farmhouse at Haynes Corners, and if he's a pal of that other mutilated feller."

"'Mutilated?'" Luce glanced at him quickly and Henry nodded.

"He was born with ears the same as anybody else—but never mind that now. Did you talk with him yesterday, George?"

"*At* him," George corrected. "The interview was a monologue on my part except for one jeering remark from that freak when I'd spent nearly all my ammunition. I tried the old bluff, that we'd pinched his pals and they'd snitched on him, but he laughed at me and dared me to call him by his name. I watched his face, though, and he testified without knowing it.

"It was Mike, the supposed farmhand at Cox's place, who went to New York and rammed Miss Wyatt's taxi with that camouflaged Juggernaut of theirs whenever she left her hotel to come to us. Our friend's expression told I had hit on the truth. He knows Cox, of course, and something about the jewels, and if I'm not mistaken Luce's hunch is right, for Guardini's name didn't seem to be unknown to him. It was when I spoke of the man with the scar that he showed the most concern.

"Did you find out anything at Haynes Corners?" Henry asked.

"Nothing from the postmaster except about the last anonymous letter Miss Wyatt received; it was mailed by a village kid after passing through two other hands. I talked with the kid myself and bought this

from him for a dollar; he'd found it in the ashes of one of the burned outbuildings on Cox's farm."

He produced the plaster ear and, disregarding Luce's excited exclamation, went on complacently: "I'd like to call your attention to the hole in the back; it fits exactly over that knob of flesh on the right side of our prisoner's head, for I returned to Cliff's last night and tried it!

"And, by the way, Cliff has news of another sort, Henry. He has found something interesting among those specimens of handwriting I took to him yesterday from Ethel, but he insists that he must see Miss Wyatt himself and ask her a question or two about some friends of hers before he says anything definite. He wants you to phone her to be alone to-night to receive as many of us as can be there."

"It's risky," Henry demurred, rubbing his chin. "However, Phil wants a chance to examine that safe from which the jewels were taken. If we arrive separately there shouldn't be much danger of the neighbors seeing us and starting any wild rumors. I think we've kept our identity as the Shadowers successfully under cover so far. Even Rex is getting away with it, and his is the hardest part of all to play."

"What else did he say in that note he threw out to you last night, Henry?" George asked.

"Nothing important." Henry looked sheepish. "The doctor has one patient whose disorder is evidently mental rather the neurotic, for he's kept in strict seclusion in the right wing of the building, but Rex doesn't attach any particular significance to it. I'm going to watch every midnight for further word from him. Say, Phil, did you happen to look over the car before you put it in the garage last night? You didn't find that note, did you?"

"Do you mean to say you lost it? I saw you put it in your coat pocket!"

Henry nodded somewhat grimly.

"I thought there was a bare chance that I might have dropped it on the seat. I must have lost it when I got out and stood there talking to you. It worries me a lot, but I suppose it doesn't matter. I've told you the gist of it and it was in one of George's codes that he hasn't used in any of our cases before. Wherever it fell, it was snowed under within ten minutes in that raging storm, that's one comfort."

"If that cast was picked up in the ruins of Cox's farm, George, the false ears must have been made there." Lucian appeared to be following a train of thought of his own. "That accounts for the fact that Henry couldn't get any trace of the manufacturer in New York. They were remarkably fine specimens weren't they, Henry?"

"The most perfect I ever saw. The manufacturers to whom I showed the ear George gave me were all mighty anxious to know who made it," Henry replied. "A sculptor couldn't have turned out anything better."

"A sculptor did make them," George remarked. "I dug a whole bundle of junk out from under the burned beams heaped up in what had been the cellar, including a wad of that same waxy stuff the ears were made of. I carried what I could to Cliff's for you to examine the next time you go there."

"'A sculptor!'" repeated Lucian with a rising note of excitement in his tones. "Who could it have been but Cox?"

"That's who it was, according to my dope," George said. "In the débris of the outbuilding where the kid found that cast I came upon the fragments of a great many more and I brought some of the larger pieces along, too. They must have been models for busts or whole figures. I found parts of faces and a hand almost intact, but the rest looked as if he'd smashed them with a sledgehammer. As I said later to Cliff, I don't see how an artist like that could have been brought into an alliance with a gang of thieves and murderers!"

"'Parts of faces and a hand!'" Henry burbled in a sudden ecstasy, his hands beating softly on his knees. "Great Jehosaphat! What luck!"

"Cox!" exclaimed Lucian, his small blond mustache fairly bristling. "The natives described him to Cliff last Sunday as being little and dark and consumptive-looking. His only visitor about the time Miss Wyatt's genuine jewels disappeared was an Italian—an Italian whom I believe to have

been my old friend, Florio Guardini! Now, if by any chance Cox was Colucci—"

"Who?" demanded George. "Just to be sure I'm not losing my mind, will you please repeat that name, my dear Luce?"

"Colucci—Vito Colucci. He was Florio's lifelong friend and a sculptor of note after a certain fashion. They executed work for the same museums abroad," Luce explained impatiently. "He dropped out of sight over there for—for the reason that Florio did and I've often wondered what became of him. George! You know something!"

"No, I don't!" George retorted ruefully. "I would, though, if I could read Italian, for I unlawfully possessed myself of a letter addressed to this Vito Colucci, only to find I'd drawn a blank. I forgot all about it at Cliff's last night, but later when I reached my own room in the Quincey House I opened it."

"Where is it?" Lucian broke in wildly. "George, if you tell me you've destroyed that letter—"

"Here it is." George reached into his pocket.

Lucian snatched the letter and tore it open.

"You've hit it this time, George!" he exclaimed. "Cox was indeed Colucci and this letter is from Florio himself warning him that their game is up! Roughly translated, it reads:

"VITO, MY BROTHER:

"I have forgotten the ugly English name you bore in that so wretched hole where you have chosen to bury yourself, and I dare not come to you, so may the blessed saints direct this letter to your hands. You must fly, my friend, and at once! The jewels are being traced, and only yesterday there was one who came seeking me, but I am safe with our patron in the house of the Cellini Ganymede. Destroy all, tell no one and come to me there. See, I trust you, you are my brother, but the others are traitors, all, and would give us to the law. I await you.

"FLORIO."

"Holy Cat! He took a chance on that letter falling into Mike's hands, after calling him a traitor, didn't he?" Phil exclaimed.

Lucian smiled.

"He is evidently quite sure that neither Mike nor any one connected with their game knows who their patron is or could locate him."

"Can you?" Henry's small eyes had crinkled shrewdly at the corners.

"What is that Ganymede thing?" Phil had brought the car to a stop beside a strip of woodland.

"A famous bronze statuette by the immortal Cellini which disappeared from a museum in Rome some years ago; of his several Ganymedes it ranks second only to that in the Museo Nazionale at Florence."

For a moment the sleuth was forgotten in the connoisseur and Lucian spoke in an almost exalted tone. Then he flushed.

"I—er—I happen to know how it reached this country and was safely delivered to the person to whom it had been consigned, so I shall have no difficulty now in reaching Guardini, but—but Henry, if I get him to tell me all he knows about the jewel theft and what became of the originals, that is as far as I can go! Colucci never received this letter, thanks to George, so he hasn't joined him and is fair game for the rest of you, but I—I can't hand Guardini over to the law!"

"You forget, my boy, that restitution, not prosecution, is the aim of the Shadowers!" George intervened swiftly. "Even if our clients demand it, we exercise our own prerogative in handing over any malefactors, remember!"

Henry nodded solemnly.

"That's right! It was Rex's own idea when we went into partnership and we all agreed. We were retained primarily to discover if murder had been done and as far as we know Guardini passed out of the affair while Ronalds was still alive. The road is clear before you, Luce, and not a soul but you on the trail!"

But Henry was mistaken, for when Lester Ballyntine, millionaire mill-owner, was suddenly called away on business and settled himself comfortably in the Pullman of the early afternoon train, a swarthy, thick-set, heavy-faced man climbed aboard the passenger coach with a slender stiletto concealed beneath his coat. There were two upon the trail!

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

Intent to Kill

By GARRET SMITH

AT a casual pleasantry from their host, Martin Disbrow looked up from the intricate pattern he was tracing on the tablecloth with his oyster fork, met the glance of his old friend, Calvin Hemingway, and suddenly decided to kill him. And in the same instant there exploded in the brain of Hemingway the purpose to slay Disbrow.

No one of the bantering company about the club table noted this telepathic exchange. For the space of a second, Disbrow's smoldering black eyes stabbed Hemingway's cold gray ones. Disbrow's heavy brows were bisected momentarily by the faintest scowl. The lean dark face twitched ever so slightly.

But Hemingway's ruddy features showed no more expression than when he held a pat hand at poker. Only the swift intensity of his gaze betrayed the heat of hatred behind the plumply genial blond mask that was Hemingway's face.

That was all. But each understood and accepted the challenge.

There had been nothing unusual in the meeting or in the conversation leading up to this unspoken challenge. Horace Gavine had invited a little group of close friends and business associates to luncheon at his club to lay plans for their regular annual hunting trip together. The menu having been considered to every one's satisfaction, he settled his plump, aggressive figure comfortably, thumbs in waistcoat armholes, and introduced the topic with his time-honored formula.

"Well, here we are again breathing annual slaughter, and God help the poor brutes!"

"God helped every one of 'em that got in Dizzy's way last year, all right," jeered Hemingway.

Disbrow smiled wearily while he writhed within. An unusually good shot and a generally lucky hunter, he had been off his

form last season. He had been the only one of the party to return without a kill. Hemingway had chaffed him unceasingly since.

Disbrow jerked his head nervously, a characteristic prelude to one of his tart remarks.

"Hemmy," he snapped, "if you don't shoot this season any better than you've played the market recently, the game in your path won't need to trouble the Almighty for assistance."

Hemingway grunted. The rest laughed. They all knew that the well-calculated interference of Disbrow had been the chief factor in Hemingway's recent manipulatory disasters.

"Perhaps Hemmy can't afford to go this fall," Black suggested. "Dizzy, you really ought to pay his expenses after the trimming you gave him last week."

"Oh, I don't know about that," Sackett demurred. "I guess if they'd throw the Consolidated Tin deal into the balance Dizzy'd still have something coming to him."

"Come! Cut the scandal," objected Mansfield. "If Dizzy and Hemmy are both broke, I'll pay for their trip. I've made money off both of 'em this last season. Where do we go this year, chief?"

"Well, if nobody objects, I thought we'd try for elk in the Northwest. I've had a route laid out for me starting on the upper Wild Horse River. They tell me the herds are running big this year. Dizzy ought to bag enough antlers to heal last year's sore."

"I'll put up a thousand, even money, that Dizzy doesn't get an antler this trip," Hemingway bantered.

"I'll cover that and make it another thousand that you don't get one," Disbrow came back hotly, and then added with studied meaning, "provided you put up the money with the chief within twenty-four hours, in currency or certified check."

Hemingway guffawed with rather labored heartiness.

"How my friends trust me! It shall be as you say, Dizzy, dearest."

"I'm with you for five hundred on that, Hemmy," Wardlaw proclaimed. "Anybody want it?"

"I'll take it," Sackett agreed.

"All right, all right; I'll be stakeholder. Glad to be neutral," Gavine agreed.

"Dizzy may want you to give bonds, chief," Hemingway cautioned.

"Oh, no. I know whom I can trust and whom I can't," Disbrow retorted.

"Here, here, you boys 'll get personal if you aren't careful," Gavine laughed. "Let's decide where we're going. Everybody agreed on the Wild Horse country?"

"Isn't that where old Ziekman's son was killed last fall?" Black asked.

"Yes; that's right," Sackett confirmed. "Never found out who killed him, did they?"

"No. I was talking with Ziekman about it only the other day," said Gavine. "He's satisfied it was just another accident—taken for a deer by some nervous hunter. Never could prove it wasn't an accident anyhow. By gad, I've always said it was a handy law-proof way to commit a murder. There are three or four people on my list I'd like to get a safe shot at up in the woods right now."

Then it was that Disbrow looked up into the eyes of Hemingway. It was as if an electric current of high voltage had leaped the gap between them. The low fire of hatred that had smoldered for years in each brain leaped suddenly into fierce flame.

"I believe he'd do it if he got the chance," thought Disbrow. "Why not? I'll do it first."

"The mad fool 'll try it, I believe," was Hemingway's thought. "Either he or I is due for a killing. I mustn't be the one."

II.

When Horace Gavine invited this group of supposedly congenial friends to his club for luncheon he included, of course, Disbrow and Hemingway. Without them no party of his was well rounded. Gavine, head of North American Agate, was also a big manipulator of the market. These two were his favorite brokers. He divided the major share of his investments and speculations equally between them.

For the rest, the party was made up of

his chief business executives, Mansfield, Sackett, Wardlaw, and Black, able lieutenants and good fellows all.

With Gavine, business and friendship were synonymous. In business he drove his associates hard and worked himself as intensely. He played as strenuously as he worked, and shared his play with his coworkers. He picked as his business aides, therefore, men socially congenial, both to himself and to one another. Hence, to be invited to play with Horace Gavine was not only a certificate of membership in the circle next the business throne on which he sat, but a badge of good fellowship as well.

And of this inner circle Hemingway and Disbrow had long been members. Business rivals they were known to be. The circle found vast entertainment in gossip over their latest jabs at each other. But there had never been any open hint, even between themselves, that there was animus back of this give and take. In Wall Street men commonly cut each other's throats by day and dine amicably together at night.

At first this rivalry had been good-natured in fact as well as appearance. It was a game with them, and became one of the standing jests of their crowd in their hours of play. Hemingway delighted in making Disbrow the target of his broad, clumsy, and garrulous humor. He enjoyed vociferously the occasional back-thrusts of keen but venomless wit he aroused from the silent Disbrow.

Then came the black summer of 1914, when American business scurried for cyclone cellars before the war cloud. At such a time Disbrow, hard hit by the storm, impulsively generous himself, counted on the loyal support of his friends, most particularly Hemingway.

But the more coldly calculating Hemingway considered it a time when each man should act for himself first. He proceeded accordingly in the matter of Armstrong common, recouping some of his own losses at Disbrow's expense. The latter, nerves torn by the fight for survival, resented this hotly. Hemingway resented his resentment.

With this entering wedge of hostility, the breach between the friends rapidly widened. At the next opportunity Disbrow retaliated. So friendly rivalry turned to bitter feud, never openly acknowledged between them since Disbrow's first savage accusation, but all the more intense for its lack of open expression.

Still they met and smiled and chaffed with their group. The exchange of apparently good-natured repartee continued. But where Hemingway had once slapped with the broad side of his ax-like humor, he now turned on his former friend its blunt, mutilating edge. Disbrow, on his part, withdrew the button from his rapier wit and thrust to hurt.

For five years now each had checkmated the other at every possible turn. And with each coup of one or the other the hatred between them grew. It had reached the point where the ultimate business success of each depended on the ruin of the other.

And each refused to be ruined. These two, among the most promising of the younger group of operators in the Street, bade fair to settle down to a permanent second rating through this concentration of effort on each other's overthrow.

Then had come to each the suggestion of a safe method of eliminating the other. It had come at the same moment, at the climax of a month's grueling fight in the Street; one of those fights that leave men savage with reaction from intense nervous strain.

III.

When Disbrow and Hemingway left the club that afternoon they bade each other good-by with the same offhand cordiality as did the others. Indeed, there was an enforced apppearance of heartiness that barely missed being hysterical.

Disbrow returned to his office and tried to plunge into his work and throw off the maddening thought that obsessed him. To his high-strung nature and over-wrought nerves it was impossible. He gave it up after an hour, got in his roadster and took a long drive in the country.

Usually a cautious, almost timid driver, he raced to-day like the maddest of speed-demons. Useless. His mind refused to be distracted. He returned and dined alone

with his thoughts in his bachelor apartment.

Sleep was impossible. The apartment smothered him. He rushed out and down the half block to the park where he walked until nearly dawn. Then his exhausted body coerced his racing mind into an hour's restless sleep.

From dreams of murder, he awoke again to the goading thought of it.

"If I don't get him, he'll get me," he told himself over and over on the way to his office. "It's better that way," he would add. "If we don't settle it in the woods, one of us will ruin the other in the Street sooner or later."

Again when he tried to concentrate on his work he failed. And there were important problems on hand that morning. He felt his grip slipping at a time when big profits or losses depended on a tight grasp.

Suddenly the tension grew too strong. This murder passion was demoralizing him. It was two weeks of waiting before they started on the trip. He could not stand the suspense that long. He would drop the whole mad notion right now and remove the temptation from both of them. He a murderer? What madness!

He got Gavine on the phone while the purpose was hot.

"Disbrow speaking. See here, Gavine, I hate to be a quitter, but some things have come up this morning that 'll make it impossible for me to go on the hunt. Mighty sorry."

"You, too, by gad!" exploded Gavine. "What the blazes is the matter with this party this year? Hemingway just called up and begged off, too. If you fellows were married I'd think the women were to blame."

Hemingway backing out too? Disbrow did some quick thinking and had a revulsion of feeling. He regretted giving himself away to Gavine.

His rival had been bluffed out, but had gotten the same satisfaction from him. He mustn't let Hemingway know he, too, had shown yellow, nor could he willingly go away for a month and leave his enemy on the ground to play havoc with his interests while he was absent.

"Oh! I'm sorry about that," he found himself saying. "I don't want to spoil the party, of course. I think I can figure things out so I can get away perhaps after all. Don't say a word to anybody about my suggesting not going. Leave Hemmy to me. Guess I can make him go."

A moment later he had Hemingway on the phone.

Hemingway's cold, phlegmatic temperament had reacted differently from Disbrow's, but to the same end. His first mad murderous impulse had cooled almost instantly to dogged determination. Once having made up his mind to the thing he refused to let it interfere with business. Indeed he worked the harder to keep himself from dwelling on it.

No solitary ride or walk for him when business was over. He sought the gayest bunch he could find for dinner and the evening, and caroused until a late hour. Then he slept—slept just as he had long accustomed himself to sleep on the eve of a critical fight in the Street.

And when he awoke, a little let down from the excitement of the previous day and the excesses of the evening, he was in a mood for caution.

"I'd like to do it! Best chance in the world!" he mused, sitting on the edge of his bed. "It won't do, though. Beastly thing to think about afterward, this being a murderer. Might be some slip-up—might get caught. Poor sportsmanship, anyhow. Better to smash him in the market."

So, as soon as he reached his office he called up Gavine and told him he'd had an attack of faintness the day before, and his doctor had warned him against any strenuous exercise for the next six months or so. He felt vastly relieved despite his host's indignant protest.

An hour later Disbrow had him on the wire.

"What's this I hear about your backing out of the trip, Hemmy?" he demanded. "Gavine's just told me you're not going. You're a sweet sort of a knocker! Afraid you'd lose the two thousand you've got up on our kills? Well, I'm going, Hemmy, and if you welch you'll never hear the last of it. You don't dare go, Hemmy."

Hemingway snorted. All his caution vanished.

"So that's how you feel about it, Dizzy. Well, nobody ever dared me yet and got away with it. I'll be there, doctor or no doctor."

Hemingway turned from the phone with a dry chuckle in which there was no mirth, and plunged deeper than ever into his work.

Disbrow sat for a long time looking into space and seeing nothing, a deep scowl on his face and a low flame in his dark eyes. A boy who came to him presently with a message had to speak twice before Disbrow heard him.

IV.

When Gavine's guests gathered in his private car at the Grand Central Station two weeks later, Disbrow and Hemingway were the last to appear. Each had dreaded the start, each hoped to the last minute that the other would fail to appear.

"Began to think you two had given us the shake after all," grumbled Gavine.

"Both been out making side bets," Wardlaw ventured.

"More likely practicing in some shooting gallery." Black added. "You can see from their shining faces they're both out for a killing."

For an instant Disbrow caught Hemingway's eyes again and exchanged with him the same telepathetic message that had passed between them that day at the club. This was their first meeting since then. They had carefully avoided each other meanwhile.

And all the way to the hunting ground they managed to keep as much apart as possible without attracting attention to that fact. Small as was the company, it tended constantly to divide into two groups at opposite ends of the lounging compartment around Disbrow and Hemingway respectively, both seeking to register nonchalance and all the time surreptitiously watching each other.

Being in for it now, beyond recall, each in his own way accustomed his mind to the inevitable as a condemned man deprived of his last hope of reprieve steels himself for the supreme moment in the death chair. Hemingway, having settled the matter, kept the thought of it as far as possible in the background of his mind by unceasing activity, endless poker, interspersed and overlaid by constant banter. At night he read himself to sleep.

Disbrow talked less and played less, brooded much. He must keep himself to his purpose by ceaseless reflection on his grievances, steady feeding of his hatred.

The first night in the woods neither slept. They occupied adjacent tents, so near that in the stillness of the forest night each could hear the creaking of the other's cot as he tossed restlessly.

As the hours wore by they fell to listening for each other's movements. It became almost a hypnosis, each lying motionless, breathless, tortured by every wrinkle in his rumpled blanket, but determined not to move before the other. Then, when the tension became too great for one, and his cot would creak once more, the occupant of the other with a sigh of relief would seek an easier position.

Neither believed the other fool enough to attack him in the night in camp, in the midst of his fellows. Yet that was exactly what each involuntarily dreaded. Again and again Disbrow fancied he heard his neighbor stealing from his cot. As many times Hemingway fell victim to the same delusion.

Once, after an unusually long silence, Disbrow heard a twig snap outside his tent. He lost control of his taut nerves, leaped from his cot, seizing his rifle which he had planted carefully beside it, tore back the tent-flap and stepped out.

Some wood creature bounded away in the thicket. Disbrow chuckled softly with relief. For a moment he stood gazing out into the autumn night. The tents lay in a wood pocket shrouded in almost total darkness by a ceiling of hemlock branches and side walls of scrub oak.

But some two rods before him lay the shore of a little lake, a dimpling path of moonlight leading across it to low mountains dimly discernible. Save for the soft whisper of a breeze in the black hemlocks the silence was absolute.

Under this soothing influence Disbrow

felt his nerves loosen a little from their tight grip. He let his gun stock slip to the ground, and leaning on the muzzle, took in deep breaths of the resinous air.

Then, suddenly, from somewhere across the lake, came the low melancholy howl of a wolf.

The spell was broken. Disbrow shivered. Nerves and muscles tightened. Involuntarily he stepped back a pace. The dead leaves rustled under his feet, and almost at his elbow he heard an answering rustle.

He whirled, facing the sound, rifle to shoulder, finger on trigger.

"Who's there?" he whispered hoarsely.

Then he found himself blinking in the glare of a pocket flash light. Hemingway's irritating chuckle came from behind it.

"Drop your gun, Dizzy, you fool!" he commanded.

Disbrow's eyes, now adjusted to the sudden illumination, caught the gleam of Hemingway's own gun-barrel.

The same thought flashed through the minds of both. A shot in the dark. The rest of the party piling out of their cots to find one lying dead, the other bending over him explaining he had been awakened from a sound sleep supposedly by a large animal prowling outside his tent and had fired in a panic, before he was broad awake.

A deplorable accident! No one really to blame!

Too late now, though. Too much chance some one else might have seen the flash and heard the voices.

They lowered their guns. The flash went out. In darkness again they stood facing each other, so near they could have reached out and shaken hands. So still they stood that they could hear each other's heavy breathing.

"Couldn't sleep, eh, Dizzy?" Hemingway broke the silence with the faintest trace of a sneer in his tone. "Neither could I. Something about this confounded silence always gets me the first night or two in the open. Then that confounded brute brought me out. Thought I might get a shot at it. Suppose you had the same idea."

"Yes," Disbrow agreed shortly. "Wonder what it was? Something big, I fancy, by the deuce of a racket he made."

"Bear or deer, probably."

Silence followed for a minute or two. They shuffled about uneasily, each waiting for the other to turn in again. But neither made a move in that direction. Each felt finicky about turning his back on the other when in the dark.

Disbrow's jumpy nerves first demanded a break in the deadlock.

"Don't feel like sleeping, do you? Must be toward morning anyhow. Why not stroll down by the shore and smoke a bit?"

Side by side they sat on a log at the edge of the lapping water. Disbrow noted grimly that Hemingway, like himself, had gone to his cot that night without undressing.

So they sat in the paling moonlight, gazing out over the lake, carefully avoiding each other's eyes, their guns between their knees, and smoked and talked nervously, incessantly, on all manner of topics, none of which interested them in the least.

And there, a little after dawn, Gavine, himself an early riser, found them still at it.

"There they were chattering away like a couple of schoolgirls that hadn't seen each other for a year," he told Mansfield a little later. "I've sometimes wondered if there wasn't a little real soreness between them the way they go after each other in the Street. Always chaffing each other when the bunch is together, too. I'd expect it of most men. But, Lord, those two! Regular Damon and Pythias stuff."

The party bade fair to spend several days in camp in comparative idleness while waiting for their scouts to report an elk herd near at hand. The time they spent in desultory fashion at poker, target practice, fishing, individual excursions into the woods after small game. Disbrow and Hemingway, while keeping up before the others their elaborate appearance of cordiality, took good care never to be left alone together in camp.

They watched each other every waking moment like two cats ready to spring at each other, yet guarding their feelings so carefully that this watchfulness was noted by the others merely as further evidence of comradely interest. There was no more night prowling, but each slept at best with an ear open to sounds from the next tent.

As the time passed the strain on their nerves grew almost unbearable. Each waited eagerly at first for the big hunt with its tragic opportunity. Then when the delay was prolonged each began watching for an earlier opportunity in their individual sallies into the forest trails. But as each suspected the other of like intent neither for a time ventured out alone.

Then came a day when Disbrow, seeing Hemingway lodged for a long afternoon session at bridge, slipped quietly away for a paddle on the lake. This Hemingway noted out of the corner of his eye, although seemingly engrossed in his game. At the end of a hand a few minutes later, he stacked his cards and arose.

"I've got a beast of a headache and I'm going to sleep it off. Get Black to take my hand, and for the love of Mike don't disturb me for a couple of hours."

Hemingway's tent flap was out of sight of the players. Mansfield, the only other member of the party around camp, was cleaning his rifle a little beyond them. So none noticed Hemingway steal out, gun in hand, carefully closing his tent behind him, and disappear on the shore trail.

Disbrow was paddling down the lake about a hundred yards out, secure in his loneliness, giving little heed to his direction, lost in his morbid thoughts. The report of a rifle roused him sharply.

A bullet had whined close to his head. Instinctively, he dropped forward in the bottom of the canoe, his eyes just above the gunwale searching the shore.

He was not surprised when, after a moment's suspense, he saw Hemingway's face arise above a bush close to the beach, survey the canoe for an instant and disappear again. He heard the crackle of feet hurrying up the trail toward camp.

"Thinks he got me," mused Disbrow. "That's round one and score for me. I'll let him stew over it for a while."

He maintained his position in the bottom of the craft for a few minutes, then gave action to his writhing nerves by paddling madly down the lake.

Hemingway, having returned to his tent unnoted, did not appear until the call for supper. He had himself under control by then and the haggard cast of his face was naturally attributed to the headache.

They were just remarking on Disbrow's lateness when his canoe grounded on the beach, and he stood before them with a casual word about getting farther away than he realized before he turned back.

In the dim, uncertain firelight no one noticed the swift, amazed horror that swept Hemingway's face.

Disbrow, who had himself well in hand by now, was enjoying the situation. He made no mention of the shooting incident.

"I've got him rattled," he was thinking. "It 'll be my turn next and I won't make a fluke of it.

Hemingway tried a little of the customary banter, made a poor showing of it, and presently, feeling for once in his life that his nerves were likely to betray him, declared his headache had returned full force and that he was going to turn in for the night.

Hemingway was notably jumpy and restless the next day. For once Disbrow, feeling his advantage, was the calmer of the two.

After luncheon Hemingway paced nervously back and forth for a few moments, then got out his rifle.

"Guess I'll stroll out a bit and see what I can pick up," he remarked.

Then he looked at Disbrow and added, apparently as an afterthought:

"Want to come along, Dizzy?"

Disbrow, taken off his guard, started perceptibly. For a moment he studied the other's impassive face. He suspected a covert challenge in the invitation.

"Why, I'd thought of a little hunt some time this afternoon. Which way are you going?"

"Thought I'd go down the lake trail."

"Well, I'd planned going up the lake. I've got to go over my gun a little first, anyhow. Don't wait for me."

But Disbrow's going over of his gun was perfunctory. Within ten minutes after Hemingway set out he also left camp, but in an opposite direction.

Once past the bend in the trail and out of sight of the rest of the party, he struck into the woods at right angles to the path

and began cautiously, quietly, picking his way around the camp in a wide circle. He aimed to intercept Hemingway somewhere along the lake shore. To-day it was his turn.

The woods in this particular region were thin and scattering. They had been extensively lumbered, and had been partly swept by fire in recent years. They were now a mixture of patches of primeval forest, sparse second-growth timber, scrub oak and low bushes.

Disbrow picked his way carefully out of a patch of thick growth into one of these half clearings. He had not expected to come upon Hemingway for a mile or more yet, but aimed to keep his movements concealed from any chance passer in order that his alibi might be perfect afterward.

But now he emerged into the open just in time to see the stocky form of a man disappearing in the opposite thicket. The other's back was toward Disbrow, but he recognized him unmistakably as Hemingway.

Evidently he was stalking Disbrow just as Disbrow was stalking him. Disbrow was certain the other had not seen him. This time the advantage was all his.

The instant he saw his quarry he crouched behind a screen of bush and watched and listened for some sign of the direction the other was taking. But no sign was granted.

Disbrow crouched low and crept forward a yard at a time, plotting each step so as to avoid brittle twigs, and keeping always a screen of bushes between himself and the thicket. So he reached a clump of scrub oak in the center of the open space and began circling it cautiously, rifle ready for instant use.

And halfway round the scrub he came face to face with Hemingway, a scant rod away, also creeping forward with weapon poised for action.

Hemingway had conceived the same idea as Disbrow and started to intercept him. As a matter of fact, he had seen Disbrow first by a second or so.

After a painful pause, hysteria seized Disbrow and he laughed. It was contagious. Hemingway took it up.

They sank to the ground, rifles over their knees, and laughed until the woods were filled with mocking echoes. They stopped laughing as suddenly as they had begun.

"Gad, Dizzy, it's lucky we were out in the open where we got a clear look at each other. One of us might have potted the other. I saw the bushes moving back there and was dead sure I'd spotted a deer."

"Same here," Disbrow agreed.

Then they arose and, as by tacit agreement, started back for camp side by side, but without another word.

"Here come the Heavenly Twins!" called out Black as they appeared. "They just naturally drift together no matter how they start out."

V.

Next morning affairs moved quickly toward a climax with the return of a scout announcing that the trail of an elk herd had been picked up ten miles down the river. To Hemingway and Disbrow alike came the conviction that to-day was to decide their strange duel. In the excitement and confusion of an attack on a milling herd of wild animals one or the other of them was certain to get his opportunity for a deadly shot.

It was mid-forenoon when the word came and within fifteen minutes the party were in the saddle and on their way down the river trail. Not until well after midday did they sight the elk herd some fifteen miles from camp in the open, rolling, grazing country where the timber had thinned out into scattering patches of woodland.

Slowly drifting over a ridge a mile away came the elk, many hundred strong, a moving forest of tossing antlers, surmounting lithe bodies.

"See that bull on the right," called the guide. "A thousand pounder if he's an ounce."

Disbrow swung his glass until the magnificent creature was in the center of its field. He was easily over five feet high at the shoulders. His red neck gleamed in the sunlight, the long black hair below his throat waving in the breeze.

Suddenly his nostrils dilated. He threw his head back until the tip of his antlers

nearly touched the middle of the brown back. Then his bugle note reached the hunters' ears, beginning in a low staccato, swelling to a roar and ending in a whistle. Every man in the party wanted that particular bull, excepting Disbrow and Hemingway, who saw the elk only as means to their own ends.

They tethered the horses in a bit of wood and started afoot to close in on the herd in a wide semicircle. Positions were assigned by the guide, each man by himself, giving every one a chance at a shot without getting in another's way.

Disbrow and Hemingway drew adjacent positions a quarter of a mile apart, Hemingway about halfway between Disbrow and the copse in which the horses were tethered. In front of Disbrow about halfway up the slope was another more extensive bit of woodland.

As the big bull leader of the herd advanced down the slope in a line between these two pieces of woodland the herd was deflected between them and began lengthening out into a wedge-shaped formation. At the apex was the leader, swinging in gradually nearer to the copse beside which Hemingway was stationed.

It presently became evident that Hemingway had the lucky position directly in the path of the prize bull. But Hemingway, who would ordinarily have been delighted, now held it anything but good fortune. He had rather have his enemy's attention centered on a possible kill and thereby have the chance to act from the side lines himself.

Disbrow had already realized this advantage and, seeing himself unobserved by the others of the party, had begun to deploy around so as to put Hemingway between him and the elk. By dodging about among the bushes he had worked a little to the rear without attracting the attention of his antagonist when something happened.

No one can tell at what trifling disturbance a great elk herd may be driven into a panic and start on a mad stampede, the snapping of a twig, the rattle of a cobble turning under the foot of one of the high-strung beasts, anything that will strike sudden terror into the smallest unit of the big group and set him plunging and snorting and communicating terror to the rest of the group. Once started, nothing can stop them until they are tired out.

The herd had been moving slowly down the slope, grazing as they advanced, when something happened a little back of the front ranks. There were frightened bellows. Back in the furry antlered mass appeared a seething center of agitation, wave crests of tossing antlers.

A tremor swept back and forward through the herd. Everywhere were bobbing heads and rearing shoulders. The panic reached the big bull. He tossed his head and trumpeted again, then whirled about and started down the slope, his followers after him.

And directly in their path stood Hemingway. His nearest shelter was the woods a quarter of a mile off. A moment more and the slow canter with which the brutes had started would break into a mad gallop. Disbrow had seen these stampedes before.

Hemingway had seen them, too. He knew at a glance that he was doomed to be trampled to death in a matter of minutes.

There wasn't a chance that he could reach the woods before they struck him, but with the unreasoning desperation of a man facing death he whirled and dashed for them. He stumbled, dropped his rifle, got up and ran on without stopping to pick up the weapon.

Disbrow took in the situation at a glance. He was well out of the path of the stampede where he could watch it unharmed. Matters had been taken out of his hands. The man he had planned to kill was about to be slain by another agency.

For an instant he was conscious of a sense of regret that he had been cheated of his vengeance. Then a swift change seemed to take place in his brain. The humane instinct implanted in him by generations of good blood and a lifetime of civilized living suddenly took the place of reason and passion.

He forgot his hatred. He forgot Hemingway even as far as his individuality was concerned. All he saw was a human being out there before him in danger of death. And his quick brain conceived a way of saving him.

Hemingway had already seen the futility

of running. He stopped and looked about in a last desperate and vain hope of finding some refuge nearer at hand. And he saw Disbrow stand up in full view and raise his rifle. For an instant he thought his enemy was going to kill him before the elk robbed him of that privilege. Then he understood.

I have said that nothing can stop a stampede. But it is possible that even a slight disturbance may turn the course of the leader and of the herd back of him; that is, if it occurs before the progress becomes a frenzied blind rush.

Disbrow fired several shots directly over the leader of the herd. The bullets ripped and crashed into the brush right beside the great bull. He reared, whirled and dashed off at right angles to his former course. The herd milled about and followed. It was over in an instant, and Hemingway was safe.

By now the herd was blind mad with panic. It was an antlered avalanche thundering down the slope with the speed of an express train.

And directly in its path this time was Disbrow.

The next instant he began a desperate handicap race for the cedar windfall back of him. The going was bad. He floundered, staggered, stumbled, fell, rose and repeated, the thunder of the herd growing momentarily louder.

In the windfall were not more than a dozen small cedars piled together in a heap. He floundered into them at last. Frantically he clambered to the center of the pile.

Almost at the same instant the living avalanche struck his little isle of safety. The front ranks piled up, reared, plunged and fell under the hoofs of the next comers. Gradually the main body divided and went around. As those caught in the margin struggled to their feet, the cedars rocked and shook like a ship at sea.

Thrown hither and thither, palsied with terror, he slowly slipped down, and as the last cohorts struck the cedar fringe he slid among them.

There was a choking, blinding dust, hot breaths seared his face, then he was being knocked end over end by the rear of the herd. Luckily none of them actually stepped on him and he struggled to his feet again, a mass of bruises and cuts.

Off beyond somewhere he heard firing. Another member of the party had got into the game. There, a quarter of a mile away, thundered the herd. They were no longer in concerted flight, but, confused by the firing, were charging madly about in circles.

Not trusting again to the cedar pile, he looked for other refuge. The ground seemed to fall away sharply in a ragged margin some hundred yards below him. He made for it.

With his mind on the distant ridge, he almost ran into a mass of brown fur, antler topped, that dashed around a bowlder. He recognized the bull leader of the herd, and at the same instant fired blindly. The bull stumbled and fell, then arose with a roar and staggered for him. Disbrow had broken one of the brute's legs.

On his own injured limbs he was just able to keep out of the animal's reach. The elk paused and bugled in pain and baffled rage. The herd caught their leader's call and started that way again.

So they made for the hoped-for shelter, the battered man and the battered brute, and every moment the throng beyond swept nearer.

Again and again Disbrow stumbled and fell. Each time the antlers almost reached him.

The ridge now seemed an infinite distance away. Disbrow's strength was rapidly failing. It wouldn't help much to distance the leader only to be trampled down by his followers.

Suddenly he had the sensation of being on the edge of a cliff, but his swimming eyes refused verification. Involuntarily he halted. Then the antlers struck him and he went down. Above came the roar of a thousand hoofs.

When he got his breath back again he found he had stumbled into a narrow gully some three feet wide. His wounded pursuer had fallen over him and lay wedged there.

Just above Disbrow's head the sharp hoof of the wounded animal struck frantically, and with each kick came nearer to the man's head as the great elk wedged tighter. Dis-

brow was pinned fast, and struggle as he might, he could get no farther from the living sledge hammer.

Finally the sharp hoof grazed his head and he lost his senses again.

When he came to he was amazed to find himself lying on the ground, Hemingway and Gavine hanging over him. Near him lay the carcass of the big bull.

As his senses cleared he saw that Hemingway, too, was torn, bleeding and pale. His dazed mind struggled with the problem of what had happened.

"You two are the little heroes of the day, all right," Gavine was saying. "Damon and Pythias stuff to the last.

"Hemmy's just told how you turned the stampede on yourself to save him. Then what does he do but risk his life by going back after his gun, working over among these milling brutes. He nearly got done up by 'em, but he got here in time to finish killing this bull before he could kill you.

"Guess you fellers are both out of the hunt for the rest of the trip, but looks like you'd got a pair of antlers between you. You both had a hand in killing this bull. So I'd say all bets are off."

Disbrow looked into the eyes of Hemingway, and this time there was no hate there. Feebly, he raised his hand and grasped Hemingway's.

"I'd say all bets are off, Hemmy! How about it?" he whispered, smilingly.

"I'll say they are, Dizzy, old top," the other man exclaimed, fervently.

DO YOU REMEMBER—?

DO you remember when the world
Was quite as young as you,
When sails of cloud craft all unfurled
To course the azure blue;
When fairies breathed among the pines,
And down the woodland way
Your spirit quaffed Arcadian wines
To greet the golden day?

Do you remember when the night
Had settled ebon deep,
When all your world of life and light—
Save you—had sunk to sleep—
When listening waters 'neath the fir
In silence paused athrill,
And vagrant breezes ceased to stir
While sang the whippoorwill?

Do you remember when the scheme
Seemed lordly, kind and true,
When there was but the wonder dream
Ere broods the sullen rue;
When through your veins ran rosy wine,
And pomps of youth were then
As Roman emperors come to dine:
Do you remember—when?

Olin Lyman.

Smoke of the Forty-Five

By HARRY SINCLAIR DRAGO

Author of "Whispering Sage," "Desert Law," etc.

CHAPTER XXVI.

BETWEEN THE LINES.

OLD Aaron had had no intention of going to the Diamond Bar when he drove away from Brackett's stable. If the Basque had followed him for a block or two he would have known as much because Gallup turned his team from the main road and pulled up before his own house.

Johnny was standing in front of the hotel at the time and he promptly surmised the reason for Aaron's use of his team. The boy had about given up any hope of finding Madeiras. The appearance of Gallup made him decide to act alone.

"Sure as you're born," he said to himself, "that old crook is goin' to take Thunder Bird out in the brush and pump lead into him. I'll bet I have somethin' to say about that."

When Johnny crept around the front of the house he saw that he was not mistaken. The old chief, bound and gagged, sat disconsolately in the rig. Aaron had gone back upstairs. The boy could hear him closing a door.

"Here's where I take it on the run," Johnny told himself. A minute later he was in the buckboard beside the Indian. Grabbing the reins and giving the horses the gad took only a second.

When Gallup came out the team was gone. He cursed and ranted, but Johnny and Thunder Bird were beyond the sound of his rage.

A mile out of town the boy brought the team to a halt. Thunder Bird's eyes expressed no surprise. When Johnny had untied him and removed the gag from his mouth the chief made no attempt to speak.

"Men come soon, chief," Johnny said,

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thoroughly provoked at the other's reticence. "You make talk pretty quick."

Thunder Bird shook his head slowly. "You talk, me," he mumbled.

"No?" Johnny exclaimed hotly. "Mebbe so you change um mind. All the same I not come, Gallup kill you."

A sound almost a laugh broke from Thunder Bird's lips. "I think—me—mebbe so you come. I see you on top train."

Johnny disregarded the Indian's words.

"Chief," he said, "many, many years you not come to white man's town. Why you come to-night?"

"No tell him that."

"Gallup old friend with you, eh? You come, he tie you up—why you let him do that?"

Thunder Bird's chin was resting upon his chest. "*Huy!*" he grunted. "To old, me—too old."

Johnny was not getting anywhere. "Chief," he drawled, unpleasantly, "it was you that Traynor came to see."

Thunder Bird turned his shrewd old eyes on the boy. "Mebbe," he answered.

It was admission enough.

"So," Johnny continued, "you know who kill him, too, eh?"

The Indian did not answer at once. When he did, he surprised the boy.

"Mebbe me." A soft, mocking laugh followed.

Johnny stared at him. "No," he said at last. "No—no! He come on Reservation—he come away from Reservation. You no kill him. White man kill him." Johnny tapped his chest. "Me, I know how"—pointing to the chief—"you know why. Traynor no fool. He watch. Man catch him when he sleep. If you not tell me his name, chief, easy me, I find out who brung you to town. Mebbe that man talk. Lots of men talk by and by. You talk now, eh?"

Thunder Bird shook his head determinedly. "No talk me. You wait—two, t'ree day you find out."

It was an artful answer. Johnny understood the cunning insinuation it carried. A muttered "Humph!" escaped him. "You mean, chief, that in two or three days somebody 'll find a man with a bullet hole clean through him or with a knife stuck in his back, and he'll be the man that killed Traynor. I savvy your talk, but it don't go. Dead men don't talk. No talk, no good."

"Man talk, jail catch um."

This observation gave Johnny renewed hope. "You talk now," he said, "law catch um man, no catch um you. No talk now, mebbe so law catch um you by and by."

Thunder Bird was unmoved. "No," he murmured. "Law no catch um me. Law no good for Indian—nothing no good for Indian. Piute make his own medicine."

"Sometime Piute medicine is bad. No good all time," Johnny argued. "I make good medicine for you, all the same you tell me."

Thunder Bird would not unbend. Again and again Johnny tried to make him speak. The boy's patience gave out in the end. He knew that in ten minutes the old Indian could clear up the mystery of Traynor's death if he would. But, no; his dignity as a chief had been assailed, and Thunder Bird was going to avenge the wrong in his own way. He couldn't have said it any plainer. And the prospective victim— Who else but old Aaron?

There could be no doubt of it. Johnny was satisfied that the chief was pointing to Gallup as the murderer of Crosbie Traynor. But the Indian had not made a single statement that could be used as evidence to convict the coroner. His words were all innuendo. A man had to make his own conclusions.

Johnny knew from experience that threats were idle with Thunder Bird. He would talk when it pleased him to do so, and not before. Jumping to the ground he said sharply:

"Chief, you take the team; you go Reservation. I watch Gallup. Best you no come back. If you see Madeiras tell him I want him come quick. You fan it now if you want to get back before daylight."

Johnny trudged to town as the chief drove away. He felt defeated, held off when success was almost within his grasp. Perhaps the wish was father to the thought, but it was easy for him to believe that Gal-

lup had killed Traynor. He reconstructed the happenings of that tragic night on which they had found the man's body. He even recalled some of Gallup's conversation. Viewed, as the boy was doing now, it was incriminating.

But what of Kent? The evidence had pointed to him from the start. There were certain facts which were unalterable even now, but if Traynor had been killed in the manner Johnny believed, Kent could not have done it. Hobe had seen him playing cards with Doc Ritter at the very time the crime must have been committed.

"And yet," the boy thought, "Gallup's got somethin' on Kent. Absolutely yes!—and he's got him hard. Every guess I've got is weak some place, even the one about the Indian. If the chief was Traynor's friend, and Traynor was tryin' to square up an old debt, why did Thunder Bird let the man come into the Rock? The Indian must have known that Kent was shippin' from here. And if he didn't he knew damn well that Gallup was here.

"Mebbe there was somebody else, too; but the chief would have knowed. Ain't likely he'd 'a' sent a friend up against a stacked deck. And now that old devil is out to git Gallup. Sure as he does I'm licked, I'm a bust—a relic. On circumstantial evidence I could send two or three men to jail, but on the real goods I couldn't indict a jackass."

It was after midnight when Johnny got back to the hotel. Scanlon's game was still active. Johnny recognized his fellow players—the two Faulkner brothers and Tris Bowles. The Faulkners had been freighting supplies to the Agency.

"Say, Charlie," Johnny asked the elder of the two, "you didn't come in from the Valley to-day, did yuh?"

"Yeah. Got in 'bout nine o'clock."

"That so?" Johnny asked, better pleased with himself than he had been for the last two hours. "Road's pretty fair, I guess," he ran on. "See anybody?"

"No, not until we got just outside of town. That human grub worm, Tobias Gale, passed us this side of the big hill."

"Seein' him wasn't seein' anybody."

"Them's my sentiments," the younger Tris announced. "He's got down to doin' Injuns out of their bit now. Had the old chief himself with him to-day."

Johnny Dice immediately lost all interest in the Messrs. Faulkner and Bowles. Singling out Vinnie, he said to him:

"I got to wake up Tobias for a minute. We got some most important business to transact. What room did you say he was in?"

"Now, Johnny," Vin warned, "those man ees just come to leeve in thees 'otel. He's goot pay. You mak' no hell now."

"Say, you quit scoldin' me, Vinnie," Johnny laughed. "You don't know me; I've reformed. Why the sound of a gun would frighten me to death."

Vinnie grinned. Johnny Dice could have had the shirt from his back if he had asked for it.

For all of his talk Johnny felt of his gun before he knocked on Tobias's door. He got no answer, and after waiting a decent interval he tried the door. It was unlocked. Stepping into the room he struck a match and held it aloft.

"I'm damned," he exclaimed. "He's gone! What can that bird be up to this time of the night? He's strictly a to-bed-with-the-chickens sort of a person. Went out the back way, too, or Vin would 'a' seen him."

Johnny was not long in deciding on what he would do. Going to the bed he sat down and pulled off his boots.

"I'm goin' to camp right here," he said aloud. "When little Tobias comes back we're goin' to make medicine."

CHAPTER XXVII.

TIME TO ACT.

THE room was bathed in sunlight when Johnny Dice felt some one prodding him back to consciousness. Vinnie the Basque stood over him, his eyes wild with excitement.

"*Dios mio*, Johnny!" the man cried. "How you come here all night? What you do weeth those man Gale?"

"Search me," Johnny answered with a yawn. "Did I roost here all night?"

"How I know that? You come up here last night."

"Sure! Gale wasn't here. I took off my boots and lay down to wait for him. Guess he didn't come back."

"You not hurt heem, eh?" Vin inquired anxiously.

"'Course not. I'm too anxious to talk to him to hurt him."

"Well, hell's broke loose now," the Basque said sadly. "Roddy, Gallup, and Kent ees just go 'way. They look for you. Sheriff, hee's got warrant for you, Johnny."

"What?" Johnny pulled on his boots with a savage tug. "What's he after me for?"

"Kent say hees daughter ees gone; that you stole her."

"For the love of God!" the boy cried, his face paling. "It's a lie. I was here at midnight. I couldn't 'a' got to the ranch and back since then unless I'd had wings. Just what did Kent say?"

"Say the girl ees gone; room all mussed up; tracks outside the door."

"I can't believe it, Vin. It's a trap to git me. If Molly's gone, they took her themselves. Where is Madeiras. I counted on him to look after her."

Vin shook his head as he saw Johnny lash himself into a rage.

"If Gallup is back of this I'll bust him. Ain't they tryin' to find the girl?"

"*Sí!* Gallup say she be weeth you. Eef they fin' you, they fin' her. They come here look for you. They try fin' your horse, too. Horse ees gone, so they think you gone."

"Where they headin' for?"

"Elk Valley. Those Faulkner boy say you ees ask las' night 'bout the road to the Reservation."

"This gits pretty close to the showdown with me," Johnny growled. "If Roddy ever gits me I'm as good as dead. I'd just have to make a move to have him shoot me down. 'Tryin' to git away' would be his answer. They'll never take me. It's a pretty mess they've cooked up, ain't it?"

"Well, what you do now, Johnny?"

"I'm goin' to do what I should 'a' done two days ago—go to Jim Kelsey. If there is any law in this county, he's it. Vin, Charlie Paul is campin' at that spring beyond Stiles's old place. He's got my horse. Go git him for me, will you. Tell him to wait in back of the hotel. I'll slip out that way now. No sense gittin' you or Scanlon mixed up in this."

"I go myself," Vin answered. He stopped at the door and seemed to hesitate about saying what was on his mind. "Johnny," he said haltingly, "you hear all thees bad talk about Madeiras, yet you ask for heem. What you theenk?"

"Say, Vin," Johnny said warmly, "he's my best friend. What he does is done on my say-so. I don't know where he is or what he is doin', but it's right with me."

Johnny could not have said anything which would have pleased the Basque more. The pride of race was strong in Vin. His people had been fighting from the day they landed for the respect of the native sons.

The boy waited until the Basque had gone before he moved. He knew that he was face to face with trouble. Jim Kelsey held the decision. If what Johnny had to tell him was convincing enough, the district attorney could not refuse to act. It got down, then, as to what constituted legal evidence.

Gale's mysterious absence also was of alarming importance. Having brought Thunder Bird to face the coroner, it followed, as a matter of course, that Tobias would endeavor to learn the outcome of that visit.

"He might 'a' seen me drivin' off with the old chief," the boy thought. "He stole out of the hotel just as I'm goin' to do now. You can bet the cautious Toby wasn't headed for Aaron's house."

Johnny tried to catch sight of Gallup's party as it rode out of town. To see the better he opened the trapdoor which led to the roof of the hotel and crawled out upon it. A mile away he could see four horsemen riding into the north.

"A buckboard wasn't fast enough for Gallup to-day, eh?" Johnny muttered. "They'll never git anywhere ridin' that fast. Aaron 'll be so sore in an hour or two that he'll want to ride in a bed."

Johnny crossed the roof to the side nearest the railroad tracks and looked down on Gallup's house.

"My hell," he said half aloud, "this would 'a' been a grand-stand seat for the doin's last evenin'. If Toby had crawled up here he wouldn't 'a' missed a thing. And you can just bet your last cookie that that's what he did. He's just about streakin' it right now for the Reservation. Him and the old chief are goin' to have another pow-wow. Elk Valley is goin' to be 'way over-populated before this day is done. I've got a hunch some of the visitors are never goin' to come back to the Rock—unless doc brings 'em."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

JOHNNY TALKS AT LAST.

BIG JIM greeted Johnny with a laugh. People said that the district attorney knew more and said less than any one in the county. A look of almost infinite wisdom was in his eyes as he studied Johnny.

"Well," he questioned, "you're goin' to bust if you don't talk, Johnny? Let's have it."

"You hit the nail, Jim. Talk—a big order of it—is what I want to git off my mind."

"I've had my ears open, Johnny," Kelsey said. "I wondered when you'd drop in."

"You hain't heard *nothin'*. You wait. I've found out a-plenty since I started puttin' my nose into other peoples' business, as Gallup would say. I'm here to ask for a warrant."

"So? For whom?"

"For the coroner of this county—for the murder of Crosbie Traynor, same having occurred on the night of October 4 in a room of the Palace Hotel. You listen to me and see if I'm crazy or not. I suppose you heard all the talk that was made the night we found the body? Well, I won't waste no time on that, but—I found the dead man's horse. I went through the saddlebags and I found a picture. Later, I got the dead man's name. I just kept on putting two and two together until I began to git scared at what I was findin' out. Git your pencil and make some notes."

Kelsey did as Johnny asked, but he made small use of the pencil. His mind grasped the facts as Johnny unfolded them. From time to time he stopped the boy to insert a question. Whenever he did so, Johnny's answers invariably enabled him to leap ahead to the next move in this game of life and death.

Sometimes Johnny raised questioning eyes as he wondered if he were making himself understood. Kelsey merely grunted in the affirmative. Once he whistled. Traynor's letter to Molly caused that.

The boy knew his story grasped the man's mind, for shrewd as Kelsey was, he could not keep all emotion from his eyes.

Johnny went on, bit by bit, until he had not only divulged his information, but had convinced the attorney of the conclusions he had drawn.

"Can I be wrong, Jim?" Johnny asked when he had finished.

"I don't think so. But you've got a house of cards. One absolutely provable fact is all you need to make your evidence steel proof. I'm willin' to go ahead. I know Roddy, he ought to be recalled. Lord knows you've got more than enough to arrest them on suspicion, but I wouldn't do it that way. Charge Gallup with it. Facts come out in a trial that you never dream of. We'll arrest the whole click—Gallup, Gale, Kent, and even the Indian."

"I don't want Kent charged with murder," Johnny stated. "Can't we scare him into turning on Gallup? Aaron's the boy at the bottom of this pile."

"If you feel that way about it, Johnny, why not wait? Gallup will trip up if you give him time. Kent may put himself in the clear."

"No waitin' now, Jim. Trouble has caught right up with us. Roddy, Kent, Gallup and some deputy are out gunning for me. They've got a warrant chargin' me with abductin' Miss Molly. Havin' done it once, they've framed me into it again. It's just a game. They've taken the girl themselves. If Roddy gits a gun on me and I move a finger—good night—I'm a dead man."

Kelsey was on his feet. "We'll go. You get Ritter, maybe Scanlon, too. I'll be at the hotel in fifteen minutes at the latest."

"Come armed," Johnny warned. "This is goin' to be a battle. Gale is no doubt on the Reservation. Gallup will bump him off if he gits a chance. The same goes for the chief. It's a nice little way to shut men's mouths. If we lose Gale or the Injun, we're stuck."

"That is not what I'm afraid of," Kelsey answered. "Gallup is over his head in going to Elk Valley. Thunder Bird has more power than you suspect. Gallup has humiliated and shamed him. It's the one thing the old buck won't overlook. You could put a regiment of troops in Elk Valley and Gallup would still be in danger. When it comes to a matter of tribal honor—look out! You can talk all you want about civilization and its effect on the poor, downtrodden Indian; but he's got a kick left in him still. Four or five men are all we need."

"That 'll be you, me, Doc Ritter, Scanlon, and Charlie Paul. We'll be ready when you git there."

It happened, however, that when Kelsey rode up Vin had not returned with Charlie and Johnny's horse. A few minutes later, though, they arrived. The delay had allowed a crowd to form, for, in spite of Johnny's demand for secrecy, the news that a posse was being organized had spread.

Heavily armed, the five men rode out of the Rock. Soon after the town was left behind, Kelsey held up his hand and brought them to a stop.

"Men," said he, "you know what we're going after. I hope we won't have to fire a shot. I hold that shooting that goes unpunished because it's within the letter of the law is almost as bad as though it weren't. Law ought to mean justice and a square deal to all; when it's less than that, I don't want any of it. Let's go!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

EVIDENCE TO CONVICT.

JOHNNY was leading the posse two hours later when he signaled to the other men. "Rig comin'," he called as they moved within hearing distance. "Ought to pass it just about where the road forks. Let's hit it up a little."

Riding in close formation they began rapidly to diminish the distance between themselves and the oncoming team.

"Driver asleep, him," the keen-eyed Charlie called to Johnny.

"Sorry, but we'll have to disturb him," Johnny answered. "Better spread out, boys. That team is runnin'."

In ten minutes the team was almost up with them.

"Whoa, there!" Johnny cried, but the driver paid no attention to the hail. "Look out!" the boy shouted to Doc Ritter. "I'll yank 'em as they go by."

Whirling his horse, Johnny planted himself in the path of the galloping team. A mad dive for a bridle strap, and he had the off horse on its haunches. "Grab the gray, Charlie!" he cried to the Indian.

Charlie Paul's hands shot out, and in another second the team was halted. Johnny took a look at the driver, who had slipped to the floor of the rig, his face blood-stained; blank, wide-open eyes staring up at the sky.

"There you are, Jim," Johnny shouted to Kelsey as he recognized the blood-smeared face. "It's Toby Gale! They got him, just as I said they would."

"God!" Kelsey moaned. "He's all banged up, ain't he? Give me a hand, and we'll get him out of the wagon."

"He's goin' to die," Doc Ritter announced after a hurried examination, "but he'll come back for a second or so before he goes. Somebody give me some whisky."

Scanlon obliged, and between them they fanned the man's dying spark of life into a smoldering flame. Tobias eyed the five of them in turn. Johnny held his gaze.

"Can you talk?" the boy asked.

Gale tried to move his lips, but no intelligent sound came from them.

"Wait, I'll lift up his head a bit," doc volunteered.

Gale licked his lips. Seconds dragged by before he made a sound. When he did speak it was in flat, lifeless tones. He was looking at Ritter. "I'm dying, ain't I, doc?" he asked.

"You're pretty bad off," doc told him honestly.

Tobias just gazed helplessly at Ritter, searching the doctor's face for sign of the

truth which he feared. The little man's eyelids drew back from the pupils of his eyes as he read his fate.

"Oh, God, doc, I don't want to die!" he moaned. "I'm afraid of it. I can feel it coming on. It's awful!"

An unearthly sound broke from his lips. Ritter forced more of the whisky down his throat. "Tell me what happened," doc demanded. "Who shot you?"

Tobias shook his head slightly. "Let me talk, Ritter," he muttered. "My God, I've never talked. Let me have a chance now. You others go away. I want to speak just to Johnny and Kelsey."

"Better humor him," Ritter advised as he got to his feet. "He'll go in a few minutes."

Johnny and the district attorney nodded their heads and got to their knees beside the dying man.

"What is it, Toby?" Johnny asked.

Toby stared at the boy for an interval before he answered. "You hate Aaron Gallup even as I do," he said at last. "That's why I called for you. Yes, I do hate him," he repeated in answer to the question in the boy's eyes. "I've always hated him—but he's got me."

"Gallup shot you?"

"Aaron Gallup—get that straight. Roddy was with him. Roddy didn't shoot, though.

"I was going to the Reservation. I'd brought the chief in to see Gallup last night —I'll tell you why later. You know they had trouble. I was on top the hotel. I saw you drive away with the old Indian. I got a team and started after you about daylight.

"I got just about here when I saw four men coming fast. I thought they were after me and I raced the horses. The four of them split up at the forks. Roddy and Gallup chased me. When I saw it was Gallup I was afraid to stop. He yelled at me—so did the sheriff, but I kept on going.

"Gallup fired then. I must have turned around, for I saw his gun flash again. I fell out of the rig, I remember, because I was on the ground when I opened my eyes. Gallup was standing over me. 'Guess you'll stop now,' he said. 'You can talk your damned head off if you want to. Wa'n't be any one to hear you blabbin' about me.'

"I let him know then that *I* had brought the chief to see him. Ha, ha—it was almost worth getting killed to be able to tell him that. He raised his foot and kicked me in the face, and riddled me again. He's got plenty to swing for, Kelsey. Not me alone, either. Johnny knows I'm right about that. Due to me that man Traynor came to the Rock. I don't know how it happened, but Gallup or Kent killed him."

Johnny and Kelsey flashed a glance at each other.

"Oh, Lord!" Gale moaned. "I can't breathe. Where's that bottle?"

"Give him all he wants," Ritter called to Johnny. "It won't put him under."

Johnny had been staring at the man's ragged chest, but he had to turn his head away as the stimulant began to have an effect on Gale's heart.

"I got to talk quick, don't I?" Tobias asked. "Gallup ground me into the dirt for years. I made up my mind to get square with him some time. He was too cautious. I knew he had covered up something in his past. It must have been two years before I got on the trail of what it was.

"I was on the Reservation one day. Thunder Bird was getting married again. He was all decked out. Around his neck he had a chain of beads, and hanging on the middle of it was a piece of a white man's silver watch chain. It was Mexican made, I guess—I'd only seen the like of it once before; Gallup had such a chain, and it always looked to me as if it had been broken off.

"I asked the chief where he got those links. He was on edge in a second. I mentioned Gallup's name. That floored him. I found out afterward that he had not been in town for years, that he had no idea of Gallup's nearness. I made a good friend of the Indian. It took me a year or more to piece together the story of Gallup's past; but I got it. That was three years ago.

"I managed it so that Thunder Bird got a look at Kent and Gallup. He recognized them at a glance.

"I got busy hunting for Traynor. Took

me until a month ago to find him. When he came I was on the Reservation. I talked to him, and part of what I'm going to tell you I got from him, the rest from the chief. Now, for God's sake don't let me pass out until I've finished."

Gale paused for a second or so. "Got to make it short," he began again. "It was down in Arizona. Traynor, Kent, and Gallup had a copper claim in the Painted Desert. Traynor was married. Had a wife and baby girl living in Flagstaff. All this happened nineteen or twenty years ago.

"Thunder Bird had skipped from the Reservation—some trouble growing out of the Mormon raid—he was hiding out down around the Little Colorado. Traynor hired him to freight supplies to their mine.

"The claim began to look so good that Gallup and Kent decided to get rid of Traynor. They sent the Indian to town, and as soon as they were alone the two of them jumped their man, hogtied him and rolled him out in the sun to die of thirst. Two days nearly finished him.

"Kent, then, loaded him onto a mule and took him out north and left him for the buzzards. They were in the clear—men dying right along like that for want of water. They put up a fine show when the Indian returned. Told him Traynor had been gone two days, that they had hunted for him until their water gave out.

"It was a pat yarn, but the Indian noticed that broken watch chain and found the piece Traynor had twisted off in the fight. That night he stole what water there was in camp and went after the missing man. He searched for days without finding him. A wandering band of Shewits had picked up Traynor and carried him off to their village north of the Virgin. Two months later Thunder Bird found him there.

"Traynor went back to Flagstaff, but Kent and Gallup were gone, also his wife and child. Six or seven years elapsed before they showed up in this country. Traynor's wife had died. Kent claimed the girl for his daughter."

"You mean Molly," Johnny gasped. "She ain't Kent's daughter?"

"No. Her right name is Molly Traynor. Traynor combed the West looking for them. That's why I couldn't find him. Gallup had sold the mine for a good price. Traynor managed to get a little out of it. I guess that about tells it.

"I didn't know Kent was shipping from the Rock this year or I would 'a' warned Traynor. Gallup had left for Salt Lake to be gone a week. I thought it was all right for the man to come into town.

"But both Gallup and Kent were here. I knew it that night when I got back. I watched; I was sure there'd be trouble. I didn't want Traynor killed. I wanted to break Gallup. He knows how it was done, Kelsey. Make him tell—make him talk. Promise me you'll get him."

"Johnny knows how Traynor was killed," Kelsey answered. "If it's any comfort to you, you can bank on it that we'll get Mr. Gallup—and he'll talk."

CHAPTER XXX.

MADEIRAS APPEARS AT LAST.

JOHNNY got to his feet in a daze, leaving it to Kelsey to close the dead man's eyes. The boy had easily grasped Gale's dramatic story, but his brain was so busily engaged in separating the many details into their proper sequence that it was impossible for him to think clearly.

Out of the jumble of confused facts one thing came to overwhelm him. Molly was not Kent's daughter! That was his big surprise.

In a way, Gale's story explained things about as Johnny had fancied them. Beyond question Gallup had been the actual murderer. Kent was almost equally guilty, though. Johnny realized how impossible it was going to be to keep the cattleman from spending the rest of his days in jail.

"Thank God, he ain't her father!" he said to himself. "He's guilty, and he'll have to pay for it."

The other men were bunched about Kelsey, and Johnny heard him say:

"Gallup shot him. Gale had so much on the man that Gallup had to kill him. Johnny had enough on Aaron to satisfy me; Tobias clinched it. He swore that Jackson Kent and the coroner of this county killed

Crosbie Traynor—it was to hide a crime committed twenty years ago. It's a strange story, boys; but the thing to do now is to get going. We want Kent and Gallup alive—remember that."

"Best thing to do, I guess, is to unhitch the team, and put Gale back in the rig and leave him here," doc suggested. "Did you notice this, Jim? Gale's gun? It's been shot twice. He must have tried to get in a lick."

"No," Johnny cut in. "They fired it after they'd got him; threw it in the wagon and gave the horses hell. If it hadn't been for us Gale's body wouldn't have been found until the team got to town. That would have looked like suicide to a lot of people."

"That's about the way I figure it," Kelsey agreed. "If you boys are ready we'll go."

Johnny and the district attorney rode abreast as the party started on.

"Glad you didn't say anythin' about the girl," the boy remarked. "I want to save her all the misery I can."

"I know, Johnny; but it's not going to be possible to keep Kent out of this. Most of the money he has belongs to her. She will get her share of Gallup's pile, too. The best thing to do is to come clean with the whole story."

"I don't want you to do that, Jim—not until you have to. Only for me there wouldn't been a murmur. I nailed Gallup and Kent. Molly's happiness is all the reward I want. I've got a right to ask for that, and I'm doin' it now. I don't know where she is, but I'll find her. In some way I'm goin' to try and break this thing to her a little at a time. She's been through hell these past weeks."

"Don't fret, Johnny. And I want to give you a bit of advice. You can take it or not. It's well meant. You'll find the girl. Kent wouldn't harm her. I think I know how things are between you; marry her—*at once*. Get her down to San Francisco or Santa Cruz. After you're there, begin to tell her the truth. And remember this—when you come back *don't* go to the ranch. Get a house down in Winnemucca. Buy a car, and you'll be able to get back and forth from the ranch in no time."

"That's sure a gay future you're paintin' for me," Johnny smiled lugubriously. "All I got to do is to make her see it—takin' me and all the rest of it."

"Well, I'm going to pay you a sincere compliment, Johnny—she couldn't pick a better man."

"Oh, pie!" Johnny exclaimed, ridiculing Kelsey's words.

"Pie or cream puffs," the attorney remonstrated, "it's all the same with me. I know what I know. When a man will play as hard as you play, I know he'll work when the playing days are over. The Diamond Bar is a big property. No matter what happens to Kent he'll have to give the girl her share. That 'll be a job for you. Preach it into Miss Molly that she must start a clean slate. Old scenes bring back old memories, and old memories haunt us. The past is past."

Kelsey laughed to himself. "That's the most talking I've done in a right smart bit of time. No charges, either."

Johnny smiled, too. "Well, at least I'm obliged to you, Jim," he drawled. "You've got *my* vote, anyhow."

Scanlon, who had been riding ahead, drew up his horse and waited for the others to come abreast him. "We'd better spread out," he suggested. "If they see us riding together it's going to look suspicious. They don't know we're after them. If each man goes it alone one of us is sure to pick them up. Let the one that does string along until he meets another man. Between the two of them they ought to get the drop."

"You always did know how to draw to a hand, Scanlon," Johnny answered approvingly. "I say, break up right here."

"All right," Kelsey agreed. "Each of us understands what to do. I'll take the eastern cañon; Scanlon, you go straight ahead; doc and Johnny and Charlie Paul can spread out to the west and work north. We'll meet at the Agency by evening."

In pursuance of this plan they separated. In half an hour Johnny found himself alone, crossing a narrowing plain between two broken ranges. The Indian was on his left, Doc Ritter on his right. By noon time they were miles apart.

The plain which Johnny had traversed

came to an end. Before him arose giant mountains. It was his intention to scale them and later on to cross a high plateau to his north, eventually coming to the trail which led to the post trader's store.

The boy's horse made slow progress during the next hour. Every foot of the way was an uphill climb. On reaching a fairly level basin in the mountainside Johnny stopped to let his pony get his wind. Reaching for his tobacco and papers, Johnny began rolling a cigarette.

The *zing-s-sss* of a bullet terminated the operation very abruptly. With a backward lunge the boy threw himself out of his saddle, and hugging the ground, wriggled to the cover of a giant bowlder. Ten yards away he could see his hat, a neat little hole showing where the bullet had passed through.

Not more than a second later, it seemed, another shot sounded. Johnny's head swung around to find the source of it. As he stared above him he saw a man rise to his feet, sway for an instant as his gun dropped from his hands, and sink back out of sight.

"It's Kent!" Johnny gasped.

A voice called then:

"Hullo—Johnny! Hees all right for stand up. It's me—Madeiras!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE DEATH CHANT.

"FOR God's sake!" Johnny cried when he reached Madeiras. "What did you kill him for?"

"Eet's either you or heem. You t'ink I let heem pump lead like that into you?"

"Have you been stalkin' him?"

"I watch heem all right. Thunder Bird and feefty braves ees up beyond. Gallup and Roddy ees on other side of mountain. You most t'ink eet was a raid. Gallup die if he come close."

"We've got to stop that, Tony. Gale's been shot. He confessed. Gallup killed both him and Traynor. Kelsey and a posse are spread out in the hills to git him. I been lookin' my eyes out for you. Who told you I was alive?"

"The chief. He tell me you want me."

"You bet! Kent and Gallup have got Molly hidden somewhere. They swore out a warrant for me, chargin' I took her."

Tony smiled very superiorly. "No," he said. "They ain't got her; me, Tony Madeiras has got the girl!"

"What? You stole her?"

"*Si!* I watch Gallup leave town las' night. I lose time before I follow, but I go pretty dam' fas' when I get started. I t'ink he ees go to the ranch. I say I tak' the girl before I let heem have her. *Por Dios,* that girl hate me. I have fight to tak' her away." Tony shook his head. "Such nice girl, Johnny—sometime I wish you not come back."

"Well, where is she now?" Johnny demanded excitedly.

"Don' worry, she's safe—she's in Thunder Bird's lodge. Hees squaw ees tak' good care of her."

"That's no place for her, Tony. I don' want her to know anythin' about what's happenin' to-day. You git behind me now and we'll crawl over to Kent. Look out, he may not be dead. He lost his rifle, but he may have a pistol on him."

"No need be afraid," Tony assured Johnny. "I tak' good aim."

When they found Kent he was propped against a rock with a pistol in his hand, but he was so far gone that he could not lift his arm to fire. "Go 'way," he muttered. "Let me die in peace."

"No, Kent," answered Johnny. "Too many things have happened to-day to go without a word with you. With all your faults I know you love Molly. I've got to talk. Gale has been killed. He told the truth about you and Gallup and Traynor. There's a posse surroundin' Gallup. They'll git him if Thunder Bird don't."

"You lyin'?" the old man questioned.

"I'll prove that I ain't," the boy replied, and he retold part of Gale's story.

"You win," Kent said at last. "I never should have opposed you. But I ain't afraid to die. Best that I do, I guess. Molly is against me. You killed her love for me—and she did love me. Yes, she did! Won't you fix it some way, Johnny, so that she won't know all—that—that she wasn't my girl?

"I ain't taken a penny of her money. In

fact, I've doubled what I got out of the mine. It's all hers. Gallup's got my notes for thirty thousand. He won't be able to collect. That's good, ain't it—beatin' him?

"He shot 'Cross.' Got him from the top of one of those box cars while I was tryin' to make an alibi for myself by sittin' in Ritter's office. Think of him turnin' on me after what we'd been through—tryin' to take Molly. God, I'm glad she's free of him! Tell her you and me made it up, Johnny—that I said I hoped you two 'd be happy. Will you do that?"

The old man tried to lift his arm beseechingly.

"Don't let her know about me—don't tell her she wasn't my child," he begged. "I raised her, Johnny—her little baby hands. I can feel them."

In spite of Johnny's efforts Kent forced himself half erect. "You've got to promise me, do you hear?" he went on. "I couldn't die if I thought she was goin' to know. I couldn't, I tell you—I—I—couldn't."

He fell back before the boy could catch him. Madeiras put his ear to the man's chest.

"He's gone," Johnny whispered to the Basque. "Yes, sir, the old man's gone! There's all that's left of Jackson Kent. Two months ago who'd ever have thought it would come to this?"

Johnny got to his feet and walked to a bowlder and sat down. "I got so I was hatin' him," he said to Tony, "and yet it kinda chokes me up to see him lyin' there like that. Things used to be pretty pleasant in the old days on the range."

Johnny's words and the look on his face caused Madeiras more concern than the sight of Kent's lifeless body. Going to the boy's side he placed his arm around his shoulders.

"Never min', Johnny," he said. "Kent try dam' hard do ever't'ing bad for you. No reason for you mak' me feel all bus' up."

"No, I don' suppose there is; but I'm goin' to try and do as he wished. If the old man had been all bad he would have put Molly into some institution and forgot her. Whatever he did that was wrong—he was good to her. So don't talk, Tony. These things square themselves in time."

Johnny got up and covered Kent's face.

"Where's his horse?" the boy asked.

"Back where I lef' mine," Madeiras answered, pointing to a little park of stunted cedars.

"No matter," Johnny went on, "we got to leave him here or—say! We'll throw him on my horse and tote him to the trees. We can tie him up between some of those cedars so that the coyotes won't be able to git at him. Give me a hand; we got to git movin'."

When they arrived at the trees they put a rope around Kent's body, and passed the end of it through a noose in another rope which they had looped over the top of one of the trees. By this arrangement they were able to lift the body from the ground and raise it to a place of safety.

Johnny had knotted the ropes when he suddenly came to attention. Madeiras glanced at him sharply.

"What ees eet?" the Basque asked.

Johnny had his hands cupped to his ears. "Listen," he whispered.

Faint, far off, came the measured, significant sound which had alarmed the boy. The Basque's expression showed that he, too, heard it.

"Do you get it?" Johnny asked. "*Tum, tum, tu-um, tum, tum*—it's a finger drum."

"*Si*," Tony nodded, his voice dry, his hand keeping time with the beat. "Eet's the death chant. Old—"

"Thunder Bird's got Gallup!" Johnny finished for the Basque. "*That's* what is waitin' for us on the top of this mountain! All we got to do is to go into that Piute camp and take Gallup away from them. And we've got to do it with gab. I know Injuns. Every minute we wait here only makes our chances slimmer. Believe me, if we're goin' to save Gallup—we've got to travel."

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE DEBT IS PAID.

A STRANGE sight awaited Johnny and the Basque. Thunder Bird's braves had surprised Gallup and captured him. Roddy, his deputy—Sol Ahrens—and

Kent had bolted. So, without a shot having been fired, old Aaron had been marched to the camp at the top of the mountain.

The rock formation looked very much as if it was of volcanic origin, a huge crater or bowl having been carved out where the peak of the mountain must once have risen. In this bowl was the Piute camp.

Johnny and Madeiras, from the point they had gained above the Indians, were able to see what went on. Gallup was tied to a stake. Thunder Bird sat facing him, and squatting in a circle about the doomed man were at least fifty Indians. Two or three squaws moved around in back of the circle, gathering rocks and depositing them in piles within reach of their lords.

"They're goin' to stone him," Johnny told the Basque. "It's a good old Piute trick."

Gallup's voice rose above the throbbing of the drum, but what he said was not intelligible to the two men watching him. Thunder Bird sat unmoved, gloating over the man before him, Aaron's torrent of words only adding to his enjoyment.

At a signal from one of the chief's sons the squaws left their gathering of rocks and approached the single lodge which had been erected. A brief wrangling, and Johnny saw Molly step forth from the tent's folds. Ten seconds later the chief's wikiup fell in the dust. A brief moment of labor and the Indian women had it strapped on a pony.

Johnny saw Thunder Bird raise his hand as Molly approached him. Plainly he was exhibiting her to Gallup. The Indian's sense of the dramatic was superb. He intended that Aaron should think that he had stolen her.

Gallup turned his entreaties to Molly, but she seemed deaf to them. Johnny saw her pick up a rock from the piles which the squaws had made. She held it out questioningly toward old Thunder Bird. Rapid words followed, the chief continuing to shake his head negatively.

Molly's actions became vehement. The chief held up his hand to his women. It ended the argument, for the next second Molly was being led toward the distant crest of the large bowl.

"He wouldn't listen to her," thought the boy. "She savvied those piles of rock." Aloud, then, he added:

"They're sendin' her away. It's pretty refined of the old chief not to make her witness what's comin' off."

"Well, what we do now?" Tony asked. "You t'ink she's any good for go down there?"

"I'm goin' to try it," Johnny answered. "You stay here. Maybe they won't let me come in to camp. If they do I'll palaver and stall as long as I can. Kelsey and the others will be showin' up before long. They can't be asleep at the Agency to what is goin' on. Ames is Injunwise. If these braves git started the top is likely to blow off before they're calmed down again."

"Bes', I t'ink, to stay right here," Tony stated firmly.

"And fail—after all my talkin'? Not on your life. I'm goin' to git Gallup, as I said I would. My luck ain't so bad. Say, where'd you get that trinket on the hat? That's Traynor's, ain't it?"

"*Sí.* I get heem out of Gallup's purse when he geeve eet to me for keel you. That's why I mak' so much excitement. Mebbe you tak' eet."

Tony offered the gold snake to Johnny, but the boy waved it back.

"No—I'll play my own stuff. You watch me when I git down there. If I hold up my hand, you shoot—fire two or three times. I'll be tellin' 'em how many men I got around the rim. If the others arrive in time, mebbe they'll understand, too."

They shook hands, and Johnny moved away, Madeiras's eyes following him. When the boy was within two hundred yards of the camp the Basque saw him raise his right hand, palm flat, above his head, his left hand, palm pointing downward, dropping until it hung below his waist. It was the Piute sign for a parley.

Johnny avoided any cover, lest it be thought that he stole up on them. A few seconds later he was seen.

Contrary to the white man's nice little laws, these Indians were armed. Johnny caught the flash of the sun's rays on the polished barrels, but he continued to walk toward them. Thunder Bird turned his head in the boy's direction as he advanced.

Gallup had recognized Johnny, and he cursed him. Johnny ignored him. When he reached the chief's side, the boy's hands moved until the tips of his fingers rested against his forehead. It was the sign of friendship. The chief answered and motioned to Johnny to sit down.

Instead of complying Johnny took the drum from the player's hands, and holding it before Thunder Bird, dropped a handful of dust upon it. It was symbolic—the omen of disaster. A murmur passed around the circle of squatting Indians.

The old chief caught the boy's meaning. "Nah!" he grunted angrily.

"My tongue speaks no lie," Johnny answered flatly. "It is the drum of death! Many men are in the hills. They are near. They no ask question—just shoot."

Thunder Bird's head moved back and forth assuredly. A sarcastic, mocking grunt broke from his lips. "White men run," he announced. "All gone."

He referred to the other members of Gallup's party. Not knowing this, Johnny wondered if his play was doomed.

"Some go, many more come, chief," he went on without a sign of wavering. "Piute women rub ashes in their hair to-night. Me good friend with you, Thunder Bird. Me tell um you, no take Gallup—white man want him. Man Gale, he is dead; man Kent, he dead, too. Make talk—plenty talk. Big Jim come. Many guns come with him. Mebbe so you remember Mormon fight? Plenty Injun die, no fires in the lodges. Now come so happen again."

And Johnny stooped and threw a handful of dust into his own face; from his lips came the doleful notes of the chant for the dead.

Thunder Bird stirred uneasily. The boy, wisely, had made no demands. What he had said had been only the airing of his sadness over the calamity facing the tribe. His talk held truths as Thunder Bird knew—the Mormon raid, for instance. Doubts for the safety of his band began to assail the chief. He saw his braves staring at Johnny.

That individual was keenly alive to the fact that the issue hung in the balance right now. If his bluff were called he would be in for it.

Bluff was one of Thunder Bird's weapons also. He availed himself of it now. "We keep Gallup," he said. "No take away him. Men not come. If men come, where they be?"

Johnny's hand was being called. He did not flinch. With a look that said a thousand men surrounded them he lifted his hand and began sweeping it around the edge of the bowl. "They are there," he said.

His hand pointed toward the spot where Madeiras lay. *Bang, bang, bang,* came the sound of the Basque's gun.

"There are many," Johnny paused to say cautiously before his hand moved onward. Was there any one else up there to answer him—Scanlon, doc, Kelsey? God help him if there was not. An eternity passed for the boy as his hand started again and moved a foot without receiving an answer. Johnny knew that he was taking the supreme gamble of his life. Another few inches his hand moved, and then *bang, bang, bang* came the report of a gun.

"Good old Doc Ritter," Johnny murmured to himself, thinking he recognized the sound of doc's heavy calibered weapon.

Johnny's hand was sweeping along. Another series of shots rang out. A pause then until his hand pointed in the very direction in which Molly had gone. The next instant a fusillade of shots echoed in the basin. Over the crest came a band of men—twenty-five or thirty of them.

"It is Ames and the agent!" Johnny cried aloud. "Thank God!" The boy had no need to fear that his words had been overheard. The Indians were in a panic. Only old Thunder Bird sat unmoved.

Johnny ran toward the oncoming men, his hands raised as he shouted to them to put down their guns. By the time they met, Kelsey and Scanlon were running down to them. A minute more and Ritter and Madeiras appeared.

Ames had organized the party.

"What's it all about, Johnny?" Ames asked. "I shore thought they wuz out to raise ha'r."

"They just wanted Gallup. He's treated the chief as though he was a water boy. When you hurt his dignity you're hurtin' somethin'."

"Wal, you'd better untie Gallup," Ames suggested. "He don't look happy."

"I'll take care of him," Kelsey announced. "I want him for murder."

This statement caused some excitement among the trader's party. Kelsey explained briefly. "We'll take him back to town," he went on. "Maybe you can find a horse for the old chief. Patch it up with him. I'll want him for a witness when this case comes to trial."

Gallup had a tirade ready for Kelsey and the others as they approached him. "'Bout time some one came," he growled. "Injuns do about as they please on the Reservation nowadays."

"Aaron Gallup," Kelsey interrupted, "I've got a warrant for your arrest. You're wanted for the murder of Crosbie Traynor."

Gallup winced as if he had been shot. "Like hell I am," he roared when he recovered his breath. "That whipper-snapper there is at the bottom of this!" And he hurled an oath at Johnny.

"That's enough out of you, Gallup," Kelsey snapped. "The boy got you, all right. We've had Gale's story also."

"And Kent's," Johnny added. "He's dead," he continued in answer to Jim's question. "He tried to plug me; Tony stopped him. It was just as we had it figured. Gallup shot Traynor from the top of a box car."

"That's goin' to be right hard on the girl," the trader exclaimed. "Losin' her paw thataway. I took her and sent her down to my house just a while back. The Injuns had her."

"You'll get her now," Gallup sneered at Johnny. "You're welcome to her. What is she, anyhow. You think she's—"

Madeiras had plucked a glowing faggot from a little "squaw" fire which the Indians had made. He pressed it against Gallup's mouth. "Wan more word, Gallup," he dared, "and I shove thees down your dam', no-good t'roat!"

Thunder Bird broke his silence long enough to grunt his approval of this proposed action.

"You and Tony will be going with Ames," Kelsey stated. "Our party will go back the way you came, Johnny. Guess we'd better take Kent's body with us. Where'll we find it?"

"In that little park of cedars soon after you start downhill."

"Wal, we'll git goin' out of hyar," Ames announced. "What about you, chief? Better trail along."

Thunder Bird shook his head.

"Suit yo'rself. So-long, boys."

Gallup, gloomy and sullen, got to his feet; the parties separated and soon lost sight of each other.

"Never seen trouble come yit when the agent wuz home," the trader grumbled as they mounted their horses. "Reckon this is about Thunder Bird's last good time."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

FULFILLMENT.

JOHNNY found Molly sitting on the steps of the trader's house when he arrived at the Agency. Her face was proof enough of the worry and excitement she had undergone. The boy's heart sank as he realized that he had to hurt her still more by the news he carried. Delay the telling as long as he might, the truth had to be faced.

Johnny might have spared himself this misery, for Molly knew more than he suspected, and explanations, which Johnny dreaded, were to be spared him.

She ran toward him, arms outstretched, as he jumped down from his horse. "Oh, Johnny," she said sadly, "it's been a terrible day. I think I'll break down completely if you don't get me home at once. I was on the ridge with Mr. Ames when you walked into Thunder Bird's camp. I wasn't afraid for you. The chief had told me so many things this day that I knew he was your friend. What did they do with Gallup?"

"They arrested him for the Traynor murder. Aaron shot Gale this mornin', and Toby confessed before he died."

"It didn't need that, though, from what I've been told, to convict him. You proved your case against him. What a beast he has been. And—*him*—what have they done with him?"

Although he suspected she referred to Kent, Johnny stared blankly at Molly.

"I—I mean Kent," she went on. "He was with Gallup this morning."

"Why—er—he's pretty bad off, I—er—"

"Is he dead, Johnny? Tell me the truth."

Johnny nodded his head slowly. "Yes," he muttered, "he's dead. He tried to kill me. Tony got him."

Molly bit her lip in a vain effort to keep the tears back.

"I didn't want you to know about your father, Molly," the boy mumbled.

"No, Johnny," Molly told him frankly. "There's no need for you to fool me longer. Thunder Bird told me. Crosbie Traynor was my father. No wonder that I felt the call within me when I received his note."

Johnny caught her as a sob broke from her lips. "Oh, Johnny," she cried. "Take me into your arms and pet me. I haven't any one but you now!"

"I'll git you away from here, Molly," the boy told her. "We're goin' to git married. You take some clothes and we'll go down to California for two or three months. Kelsey and Hobe will look after things; and Tony, too, if you'll let him. He's blackened his good name and made you hate him to help me. Don't worry about to-morrow. They'll keep on comin' just as regular as if nothin' had ever happened. Time fixes up these hurts."

It was even as Johnny said. Three months later, basking in the sunshine of old Santa Cruz, Molly and Johnny agreed that happiness was just beginning for them.

They had tried to keep their romance a secret, but the San Francisco newspapers found them out. Although the young couple acted sedately around the hotel, they realized, as brides and grooms always do, that people knew beyond doubt they were honeymooners.

Johnny was sitting alone on the beach one evening watching the silver-tipped waves breaking over the wide sands of Monterey Bay when Molly stole up behind him and slipped her arms about his neck. He caught her and held her until she paid a proper forfeit with her lips.

"Nice people do not kiss in public," Molly said, teasingly.

"Well, you knew my past before you married me," Johnny retorted with a mischievous grin.

"Oh, did I—there!" And Molly kissed him again. "I've just received a wonderful letter from Jim Kelsey. It's full of good things about you. Jim says he's sorry he advised you to move out of the county. Folks want to elect you to something or other."

Johnny held up his hands in mock horror. "No, sir, never again!" he declared. "I've got the job I was after. Nevada will have to look out for herself."

THE END.

SMOKE

EACH day at setting of the sun
I turn me home from tasks well done.

I climb the path along the hill,
While all the earth grows sweetly still.

Low in the vale where I must pass
A cottage nestles in the grass.

Up from its chimney smoke lifts free
To signal Love is waiting me.

Edgar Daniel Kramer.

The Harbor of Broken Men

By LIEUTENANT C. DONALD FEAK

CAPTAIN DANNY sat disconsolately on the leather settee in his cabin. His gray old head was bowed in sorrow. For ten years he had seen the ravages of age creep into his vessel's timbers; for ten years he had fought off this decay, always looking forward to the time when he could retire and charter her to others, and let her be the breadwinner in his old age. Then some one had leaned over and whispered the one word—insurance. That one word had been enough. It sickened him.

The struggle within him was evidenced by his working lips. One thought remained poised before his mind's eye. A pit yawned at his feet.

To think that he, Captain Danny, for forty years master of his own ship, would listen to an insidious voice counseling the wrecking of his own ship for her insurance! He tried to view it impersonally; he sought to cast it out from his thoughts. He saw himself penniless, the insurance brokers cancelling his vessel's insurance because of her age; the Sally B rotting away in the back channels of Rotten Row. He forced himself to say—yes.

The accusing finger of disgrace jabbed at him; bitter regret nauseated him. He turned away and climbed the ladder to her deck.

He would do it. The insurance companies were wealthy. No one would know; his thoughts ran on, vainly seeking a loophole.

The Sally B was to sail with the morning's tide. Her harbor gaskets had been removed. The donkey boiler was slowly raising a steam pressure for the heavy sail and the bower anchor.

Captain Danny's mate, Mr. Baker, had

said good-by to his family, and had come aboard preparatory to sailing to secure the ship for sea. His voice could be heard forward along the deck, urging the men to greater efforts at an unwieldy cat-block.

She was in ballast and bound for Norfolk for a cargo of coal, coal being the only cargo Captain Danny could get for his vessel. She had seen many years of active service, and her timbers were not as stout as in years gone by.

The Sally B had been home, wife, everything to her captain. For forty years he had guided her through raging seas, past rock-strewn coasts. Always she had obeyed him, straining every rope to further his ends. She obeyed until her hull cried out in anguish when she ran into a beam sea or a heavy head wind.

Captain Danny had ignored many sneers and gibes at his vessel's age. He had been openly advised to wreck her for her insurance by the corner loafers of his home port. Ten years ago he had laughed, but now—now it cut deep.

He loved her, and she seemed to strain in an effort to repay him. Crews had come, and crews had gone. Friends had gone, and youth had withered, yet she still answered his hand; many times he had relieved the helmsman just to feel her respond to his careful coaxing.

Seamen down East called her "the floatin' hencoop," but never, except once, before her captain's face. The denouncer had retreated, his head nearly beaten to a pulp. Despite Captain Danny's years, the corner hooligans made no more remarks about "the floatin' hencoop."

The noisy *clank-clank* of the anchor windlass broke Captain Danny's reverie. It was the mate heaving short on the anchor cable.

The Sally B surged along under full sail. Captain Danny paced the deck slowly behind the helmsman. Gone were the thoughts of disgrace; a numbing fear of old age, and the specter of charity, had forced him to a decision. He would do it. Tonight, when they had Tiger Reef abeam, he would relieve the man at the wheel and send him below. Then he would put her wheel hard over and wait.

Dead ahead lay the poorhouse, while to starboard lay a comfortable old age. One twist of the wheel would do it.

He mumbled to himself incoherently, over and over: "Dead ahead, the poorhouse; hard-a-port, the harbor of plenty." Conscience fought against a tide of stern New England righteousness.

He shunned her wheel. He dared not lay a hand on her weather-beaten rail, as was his wont. He plunged below blindly, groping for his bunk; he threw himself into it, his eyes fastened on a photograph of the Sally B, taken years ago, tacked against the wall.

They were younger then, both of them. Her trim, tapering spars towered skyward. He saw himself once more on her decks. How proud he was that day, and now a savage ache gripped his throat.

Tears came. He fought them back, clutching his pillow in the effort. His teeth sank through his lip. There was a girl then, too. She was at his elbow, pride showing plainly in her face. The bitter regret of old age added its weight to his anguish. A sob escaped him.

The creaking timbers became silent, as if the Sally B were offering sympathy from the very depths of her aged but once young heart. Captain Danny slept.

II.

It began with a sullen, oily swell from the southeast and a rapid sinking of the barometer. The swell changed into a confused sea of small swishing wavelets. The sun sank in a dark bank of clouds. A fresh breeze sprang up, blowing with increasing intensity, shifting slowly to the eastward.

The mate ordered the new jib furled. The breeze changed to a low moaning wind that blew in fresh, violent rain squalls that pattered against the cabin skylight like pebbles.

Captain Danny donned his oilskins and appeared on deck. The mate met him with: "Looks like a blow, sir."

Captain Danny scanned the hurrying clouds, took a hurried peep at the glass, and replied: "Guess 'tis, Mr. Baker. All hands

shorten sail, tuck two reefs in the mains'l, single reef the fores'l, and bend the small jib."

The mate left on the run, bawled down the fo'c's'le for all hands, and then turned to himself.

The creakings of the Sally B increased in number. She groaned her objections to the tumult without.

A cold rain was being flung into the faces of the men, in icy drops that stung like needles. Captain Danny took the wheel and sent the helmsman forward to assist in getting in the sails.

A screaming squall struck her, sending her reeling against the sea; her lee rail dipped, her lower deadeyes hidden in a smother of salt spray.

In a whirling chaos of thundering spindrift she buried her nose, rose like a gull, and plunged again, burying her catheads in a raging sea of icy water. The wind had risen to a shrieking, howling demon that tore at her ancient masts, whipping spare rope ends adrift and then snapping them into threads.

Her decks were a whirling maelstrom of gray thundering seas that plunged back and forth, seeking an outlet. The Sally B sought to shake herself. The snapping foresheet bellied out and sent three seamen sprawling in the lee scuppers. She lurched and flung the water about her deck. The gurgling, sucking, noisy waters dashed down her decks as she rose on a giant sea that collided with a surging roar against the break of the poop.

The mate saw Captain Danny motioning frantically for him to come aft. Through the smother he made his way, running as she steadied momentarily.

Captain Danny shrieked in his ear; the wind tore at the words: "Bare poles, rig storm trys'ls, and break out the sea anchor!"

The mate nodded understandingly. He touched several of the men on the sleeve and drew them forward.

The vessel tossed about like a puppet in the hand of a madman. Then the night rushed in wildly, ushered by a screaming, shrieking wind. Their world changed into a universe of clamorous, fighting elements. Hail began to beat a devil's tattoo against the Sally B's decks; like showers of silvered buckshot it pelted, tumbled in miniature meteors from aloft. The seas, like charging wolf packs, snapped at her bulwarks; she lashed back at them fiercely.

Her tortured decks groaned, her ribs seemed to crack with each lurch. Her masts swept across the sky in great swaths. Her recently tautened standing rigging strummed like a giant guitar, sounding the shuddering semitones of fury.

Captain Danny faced this howling inferno. The wind rocked him like a tottering tower, tore at his oilskin coat tail, whipping it to shreds. Gone was his sou'wester; he faced the storm.

Gone was everything but the dogged determination to see her fight her last fight. He exulted savagely when she struck defensively at the tormenting seas. She shook herself like a spaniel to free herself of the water.

Her booms and blocks swung carelessly to and fro; her whole being protested against the strain imposed upon her. Her lamentation sounded sobbingly under the whirl of wind and water, a lament, a dirge.

To Captain Danny she sang a song of victory. She hurled her defiance into the very teeth of the hurricane; she took her test like the splendid old vessel that she was. Huge gray devils toppled over her bow and crashed on her decks as if striving to split them asunder. She arose magnificently on the crest and then plunged only half defeated under a treacherous backwash. It was a universe of turmoil and clamor beneath a bowl of tumbling black clouds.

Dawn came to find a gray-haired man still at his vessel's wheel, fatigue weighing his eyes with lead. The haggard dawn painted the decks and spars a ghastly hue. The bowl of the horizon narrowed down to a few fathoms on all sides.

The Sally B seemed to have carried the screaming Gehenna with her. Within that uneven circle furious watery monsters leaped like panting demons, flinging their white-crested tops with a wild abandon on salt-encrusted rigging. Captain Danny expected momentarily to see the ancient masts

jumped out like straws through the driving mist.

Mr. Baker urged him to go below. "She's right as a trivet, sir. Take a spell below."

Danny declined, with stony, bloodshot eyes. He shook his head as if striving to escape a nightmare. "No . . . our fight . . . old gal."

He subsided, gazing ahead, dead into the smother of stinging water that lashed at their faces. Desert her now? Never! He hooked his knees into the spokes of the wheel and clung like a specter of death. Cold rain squalls struck him; his teeth chattered; his lips shone an unhealthy blue; still he clung.

The wind lulled ominously; the tail of the storm swung over them, leaving behind a sharp, icy wind that cut like a knife. The sun peeped through racing acres of gray scud. Temporary arches, composed of misting spume and sunbeams, played over the decks.

Only the heavy sea remained to smash at the creaking old hull with sledgehammer blows.

Again Captain Danny threw himself into his bunk, unaware of the faded photograph on the wall.

III.

Once more the Sally B beat to the southward, racing along a smooth sea. Once more the formidable army named conscience struggled for supremacy in her captain's thoughts. The breastworks of a stern New England sense of right and wrong loomed forbiddingly.

Danny stormed them with excuses; he hurled pretext after pretext; his age, a wealthy insurance company, and dire necessity. And at last the battle subsided with old Danny both conqueror and conquered.

He pored over the chart; with dividers in hand he measured the run until midnight. It brought him to the edge of Tiger Reef.

He fought against the insidious knowledge that his vessel had ridden out a West Indian hurricane. He refused to think of her splendid battle against the elements; he decried her apparent staunchness as treachery, but deep in his heart he knew he lied.

Deeper still burned the knowledge that dead ahead loomed the poorhouse. He lashed the tiller of his will against the forces of conscience.

At eight bells in the second dog-watch (eight o'clock ashore) he relieved the mate. The sky was overhung with a fine mist that veiled the stars. At six bells—eleven o'clock—the misting mantle dropped lower, as if offering him shelter, as if seeking to sponge out the spot that burned like acid in his chest. It dropped precipitately and blanketed his vessel's prow.

He relieved the helmsman and sent him below decks, first casting off the lashings on the lifeboat and setting the plug in her bottom.

The touch of her wheel sent a stab of remorse through him. She trusted him. Always he had fought with her, guiding her stem to safety. He wondered if she would answer when the fatal moment came.

Dumbly he held her wheel; dazedly he gave her her rudder or removed it. Automatically he held his course.

To himself he repeated: "Ahead is the poorhouse. Abeam is the harbor of plenty."

He struggled for vindication. It did not come. On his brain flashed the thought: It was he who was getting old. The Sally B had proved her worth.

"The survival of the fittest?" Had he proved his own fitness for survival? Was he worthy of commanding the Sally B? Even touching her wheel?

The clash of battle confused him; left him groping in a quagmire of uncertainty.

With a start he saw that he had passed the reef. His patent log on the taffrail spun merrily; its dial registering a good mile beyond the rocks. No turning back now.

He breathed a sigh of relief as if a weight had been lifted from his shoulders. The postponement meant a few more hours of grace. Perhaps it was best after all.

Perhaps it really was he that was getting old, and the Sally B's groanings were only the creakings of his own joints. He liked to think that this was so, and so he shut his eyes and ears at her laborings. At midnight he gave the wheel to the relief helmsman and went below.

On their arrival in Norfolk Captain Danny went to his agent's office.

"Hi, Cap'n Danny! Got a cargo of coal for you. Load at Lambert's Point and discharge in Boston. Handful of letters, too. Read 'em. Be back in a minute."

On opening the first letter, Danny's thoughts went reeling. He dropped into a chair and stared. It read:

"On the arrival of your vessel at Boston, the Board of Inspection will meet and conduct the yearly examination as set forth in section thirty-six of the Rules and Regulations for the government of the maritime vessels of the United States."

It had come at last. He had hoped they would lose sight of the Sally B in the maze of red-tape. It was thus that he had escaped previous yearly inspections. Some one had reported his craft, and the board had retaliated with official notice.

The two other letters were from salvage companies, soliciting anything that might fall in a captain's way. He understood the veiled meaning, the polite reminder that they were prepared to salvage anything of value. Their diplomacy only made the insinuation more apparent to him.

"Damn vultures!" he exclaimed; "Ill see them in hell first!"

He dashed out of the office and returned to the ship, still cursing the buzzards of Rotten Row.

As he came down the pier, the Sally B seemed a bit more shaky than ever before. Her standing rigging had slacked after the storm and hung loosely. The mate was tautening them as best he could.

Her paint had flaked off and she presented a sorry spectacle to her old skipper, who sought vainly for an excuse for her appearance. He noticed a few heretofore invisible cracks.

He descended to his cabin, and the mate through the skylight saw Captain Danny's gray head buried deep in his arms. He strolled away shaking his head slowly.

At dinner that night Captain Danny sat stiff and straight, determination marking his face in deep lines. The meal was completed in silence.

Next morning the Sally B again went to sea. This time her groanings and creakings were renewed with a vigor that sent the mate below in consternation.

He returned and said to Captain Danny:

"She's making water, sir; shall I start the handy-billy?"

Captain Danny gazed stolidly a moment at the mate and nodded his head. What mattered an inch of water when she would soon be beneath ten fathoms of it, he thought.

The mate's report had banished the last vestige of uncertainty. His course of action was definitely laid out.

The buzzards of Rotten Row would not come to rake over the ribs of his craft. He would beach her on Tiger Reef. He closed his heart to the clamorings of conscience; he cast out sentiment as drivel.

At the end of every watch the men manned the handy-billy and pumped the dirty water overside. The Sally B labored along, rolling off a steady five knots, her timbers complaining with every strain imposed upon them. Stringpieces, worked loose with the storm, chattered in the corners. She seemed bent on scattering her worm-eaten planks and strakes on the sea.

At two bells (nine o'clock) that night Captain Danny appeared on deck. He appeared to have aged a lifetime in those last few days. An unlighted pipe held between clenched teeth gave him a stubborn air.

The lookout's voice brought him from deep thought with a start:

"Getting thick, sir; shall I sound the fog-horn?"

He snapped a curt "Yes!" and continued his measured tramping. His shoulders bent forward with the worry of the problem confronting him.

The blare of the fog-horn hopelessly snarled his already tangled thoughts. He sent the helmsman forward with a curse and took the wheel himself.

The feel of the worn spokes sent the old-time thrill through him. His fingers found the turk's-headed king-spoke, and he wondered if, after all, she would answer him at the appointed moment.

He told himself he hated her. She was the one that would send him to the poor-house. She was just what the corner hooligans called her, "a floatin' hencoop." Well,

she would break her treacherous back on Tiger Reef.

He called for a lookout and when the man came up, the captain saw he was a youngster on his first voyage. He wouldn't know the sound of shoaling waters if he heard it, and Captain Danny exulted. The lookout, no matter how inexperienced, would be sufficient to cover the demands of an ever-suspicious insurance company.

He made a note in the log for the benefit of the insurance adjusters: "Stationed lookout in eyes of ship."

He threw the lifeboat gripes free and set her plug again; there would be no danger of losing any of his men. The sea was too smooth. The rocks would saw a jagged hole in her bottom and they would abandon ship and pull leisurely ashore.

The fog had settled down on the very water's edge; an impenetrable blanket.

Conditions were perfect. A land lubber for a lookout and a thick mantle to hide the act. Elation sent the blood pulsing to his head. He chuckled.

Captain Danny glanced at the patent log spinning on her taffrail and saw that he had a few more minutes to go. He reviewed his intended actions. He would wait until he had Tiger Reef on the port bow and then he would let the vessel come a point to the westward. She would make steerage without altering the sails.

He didn't dare to alter his canvas. The crew would talk.

Very easily he let her ease off until her sails were almost on the point of flapping in the wind and then held her there.

As the time approached, a great nervousness came over him. The misting sheet of fog grew thicker. It soaked his pea-jacket and ran in little rivulets down his arms.

The reef was marked by a spar buoy. Neither light nor bell nor whistle warned mariners of the menace at night or in a fog.

The mist lured him temptingly. He felt that he could escape even the sneers of those who were wise in the ways of the sea.

He wondered if she would continue straight on to the reef. Somehow, he expected her to sheer off and clear it or stubbornly refuse to obey the hand that had always guided her to safety.

He heard the boom of collapsing seas on the jagged rocks. The inexperienced lookout stood staring intently before him.

Captain Danny's arms and legs shook as with the palsy. His teeth chattered. He clung to the wheel for support.

"Only a minute more, only a minute more," he repeated to himself.

The booming came louder to his ears, that were trained in the sound of shoals and reefs.

There it was, a hundred yards to port. He would have to run as close as possible and throw his helm over, and let the momentum of his vessel carry her to perdition. Her sails would flap noisily for a moment when he altered course, but this noise would then be lost in the sound of ripping, splintering planks as she struck.

Something whispered: "It isn't too late."

He shook his head: "No, no!"

As the moment approached for the whirl of the wheel his mind was seething. He wondered if she would answer his hand. Would she swing?

Violently he spun her wheel to starboard, then stood staring at her. Would she answer him now? Was her trust still unshaken?

Slowly, nobly, she answered her master's hand. Without hesitation, she swung straight for the jagged rocks of Tiger Reef. Even unto death she was true to her teachings.

Danny trembled, muttering incoherently. "She answered me! She trusts me!"

Brokenly he sobbed:

"Sally, forgive me."

Then something snapped free within his brain.

With a half-choked voice he said, suddenly:

"God, in heaven, I can't! It's murder!"

He grabbed the wheel and savagely spun it over.

Broken bits of prayers and snatches of endearments came to his lips as he watched the prow swing clear again.

And now the Sally B was in the untroubled waters beyond, guided by a gray-haired old captain, his lips fixed stonily, bound for the "harbor of broken men."

No Change

By PHILIP M. FISHER, JR.

I WAS drawn to him at once by the somewhat sardonic smile with which he surveyed the butterfly throng before him. And his, too, was the only table in the cabaret at which there was a vacant seat; the only one, by the way, besides his own. He flashed me a quizzical glance as the waiter thrust a chair beneath me and simply nodded, though not without a certain grace, in recognition and acceptance of my invitation to drink.

The cigarette he offered was one made by a faultless London tobacconist. I noted a twinkle come into the man's eye as I, also, accepted his return courtesy in silence.

For some moments we sat thus, elbows on the damask, silver shoved aside, sipping the Golden Fizz that has made the Palace Hotel famous throughout the Orient, and puffing lazily, and as though time were a nonexistent factor in this life, at the exquisite blend achieved by the London purveyor of the best leaf from Egypt, Virginia, and the Philippines. My companion was one of those carefully attired persons who give at once the impression of valet service and extreme leisure. And that somewhat sardonic glint in his blue-black eyes was evidence enough that he had seen life, and though it might perhaps have dealt him many a blow below the belt, he still condescended to look upon it—though aloofly—and with humor.

It was my first night in Shanghai for many a year, and the spirit had naturally seized me to make the old-time rounds and determine what changes, if any, had come into the routine of night life in this Paris of the Orient. So far I had not been disappointed. The Golden Fizz was still as excellent, though the Number One Boy who made it was now gray haired; and a sudden crash at a table behind me and to the right thrilled me again with the familiar unaccountableness of this strange-peopled community.

Then it was that the stranger chuckled, the sardonic light flashing in his eyes as they took in the scene at my back. I slowly turned, as one does out there, to see for myself what was happening. It was then that the man first spoke.

"She's at it again." His smoothly modulated voice came quietly to my ear. "Ha!

And still—" There was a slight pause here that was not, however, a hesitation, but one of those purely mechanical breaks that make for emphasis. He finished: "Still—we fall for it."

The woman was standing at the far table, one foot upon the rattan of her chair, and the other, with the skirt drawn so as to expose a defiantly beautiful limb, was resting upon the white linen before her. In each wide-flung hand she held ceilingward a glass of scintillating champagne, her radiant clean-chiseled face, which in profile looked as innocent as a movie star's, was upturned toward the pictured Bacchanalian revel above, and her sweetly rounded neck gave me the thrill that only an old fool may feel.

"To Bacchus and Confucius!" she cried, in a voice that made the heart beat itself to notice. "Long may they live, and we with them!"

Two men in white monkey jackets reached for her as she drained each glass, and a spark of fire flashed as their eyes met. But the woman showed no favoritism, and with a hand upon each white starched shoulder, leaped to the floor, and with a shrill of excited laughter, held out her glass for more wine.

Another chuckle brought me back to my companion.

He read in my countenance the impression the woman had made upon me. He showed his even white teeth. In the grin was amusement, acknowledgment, and something else.

"Yes," he nodded, "she's beautiful, all right. I grant you that. But a—" he paused abruptly. Then: "You know who she is, of course?"

I shook my head.

"Just in on the Empress this morning."

He surveyed me quizzically again, but in a way I could not resent.

"Been here before?"

I nodded.

"About a year and a half," I replied. "Before the—some five or six years ago. Nothing changed as far as I can see."

The sardonic note in his voice grew stronger.

"Nothing ever changes Shanghai," he returned. "Nothing ever changes Shanghai, or"—once more that pause—"woman."

I recalled his first words.

"And so," I hinted, "she's at it again?"

He laughed heartily, and crooked his finger at a blue-clad wine boy.

"You have a good memory," he said with a slight bow. "Yes, she's at it again. You saw those two fellows reach for her? One of them is the vice-director of an oil company I won't name, and the other is buying up all the blue whites that poor Russia lets leak through into China. You see?"

I slowly turned to the woman. Impartially she was returning the graces of each of the men, and in my heart I could not blame either of them for their clashing eyes.

"Who is she?"

The man surveyed me as frankly as before.

"You have spent a year and a half in this Paris of the Orient and still dare a question such as that?" He waved his cigarette. "But it will do no harm to tell. And I will tell you the truth which I alone, of all here, know. That woman is a—murderess."

I smiled back at him.

"A secret? And you're telling that to me—a stranger?"

Then something in his eyes—something behind the glint of condescending humor made me feel that he had spoken truth. There comes a time in all men's lives when a thing they know must be told. And this man, with his leisure, his voice, his manner—but why philosophize—surely I am old enough, and have seen enough of life to know the futility of that.

"I believe you," I said, with a quick nod.

The fellow quite suddenly sobered, and leaning forward with his elbows on the table, spoke in a low voice.

"I fancied you were such a man when you sat here. And I was so enjoying the spectacle of the two fellows with her, that I fairly itched to tell some one who had ears to listen, with a mind to appreciate, and a tongue that was controlled. It is a little secret between that woman and me. Yet

here are we both enjoying life. It is too good. Yes—that is what she is: a murderess."

My own grin met his now frank one.

"I believe you, though I ought not. Whom did she lure off to her donjon-keep and put upon the rack?"

The man shook his head.

"It was not that way. She was the spider. He was the fly."

"And you?"

"Oh, I? Why, I guess I must have been the web. Looks that way now, doesn't it?"

For a moment I gazed into the milky orange of the glass beside my hand. Then I found that I must know.

"And the fly—the man you say she—"

The words were supplied for me.

"The man she murdered? Who else could it be? Her husband, naturally."

"Interesting," I breathed nonchalantly.

The man lit another cigarette.

"Somewhat," he replied. Then, with a careless wave toward the far table. "And now—she's at it again. And still—they fall for it! All alike. Amusing — now. Really get quite a kick out of it. Watching her play 'em, you see? The oil man and the diamond buyer. Quite a kick. They don't know, of course. Only she—and I. That makes it all the more amusing. It was two years ago, you know."

I raised my brows.

"Yes, two years back. Just after the war. In Manila. Oh, no; no one else knew. Only she and I."

A peal of laghter from the trio brought back the sardonic amusement to his eyes and clean-cut lips.

"Only she and I. You see, *ha!* I was in love with her. Sounds peculiar, doesn't it? I was in love with her. And she—well, she reciprocated. Tired of him, I fancy. Don't blame her a bit. But enough of that—it doesn't enter the tale at all. Only the fact that she felt she was tired of him. The sameness — monotony — you know what that can do; and does."

He raised his eyes slowly to mine.

"But I am afraid I bore you. It can have but little interest—a woman's perversity, and—"

He paused, surveying me with serious eyes, in which, however, there yet lurked the flicker of a condescending humor.

I glanced back at the table and its somewhat hilarious occupants; shrugged my shoulders; turned to my companion and found him grinning frankly into my eyes once more.

"All women interest me," I urged, "and a murderess, unshackled, and still at it, as you say—"

He sipped his Golden Fizz, surveying with amused eyes the woman of whom he spoke. And his lips twitched as he relinquished the glass and set it carefully in its circular crease on the cloth.

"He had a great scar on his face, too. Disfiguring. Disgusted her, I imagine. At least she used to say it did. But you never can tell, of course. Just a mood. Little I cared."

"The scar—her husband, you mean?"

He nodded.

"Naturally. Hemp plantation, you know, down in Mindanao. Trouble. Like with women—there's always a serpent lying in wait. Head hunter ran amuck, the story went, and slashed him across the right cheek, from the temple to the chin, with a single stroke of his wicked *bolo*. Would have had his head, too, had it not been for a lucky shot from his automatic as he fell to the ground. That's his story—the husband's. There were rumors, of course. I was pretty green to the Philippines, then, and naturally felt the strength of the rumors. Some *nippa* shack affair, gossip had it; illy timed. Irate hubby, plantation overseer, you know, home from the supply schooner too early by a trivial hour or so. With a convenient knife at hand. She said the scar disgusted her. I often wondered—And went on the strength of it, of course. Who wouldn't?"

"He came home, and found me comfortably ensconsed in a hammock behind the bougainvillia, a Bilibid table at my hand with the usual Haig and Haig, and a bucket with ice and bottles of Tansan beneath. Also a box of these cigarettes—which aren't half bad, are they?—and magazines. Oh, yes," the man grinned deliberately, "beside my hammock, on the other side, a rattan chair. And in the chair his wife."

I indicated the woman across the room.

"She?"

"Naturally. His wife. First time we'd seen the cut on his face, though the story had preceded him a month. It went purple when he found us there, though we were innocent enough then. Wife gave a shriek. Husband nodded a bit savagely at me, then held his arms to her. She recoiled, and cried out something about 'that horrible scar.' That began it, you see.

"He knew he ought to go back to his hemp, but was afraid to. Oh, no—not because he was a coward. Not he. But somehow he seemed to distrust me." Again came the frank grin, and the straightforward look from the man's blue-black eyes over the match he applied to his cigarette. "You really couldn't blame the fellow," he went on. "As I said before, I was rather new to the Orient, and I was in love with his wife. *Ha!* In love with his wife—that—woman—right over there. Gives me a kick, quite a thrill. Amusing, you know, to sit this way and watch her play the game."

I interrupted.

"But she's a murderess, you say. And yet—"

With a wave of his slender and well-groomed hand he set aside my impatience.

"Naturally. Naturally. I'll get to that. Just a bit more first, though.

"For about two months he hung around Manila. Pretexts were pretty lame toward the end. Longer he stayed, stronger he knew the suspicions of the white colony were aroused. Became furious. Caught his arm once as he raised it to strike his wife out at Lerma Park one night. Drinking, you know. Lit up the scar. Horrible. Wife protested, shuddered when he demanded his dance. Caught his arm just in time.

"Party broke up, of course. Everybody went home with his own wife. Horribly upset. Ha! But you know—with a year and a half in this Shanghai. Broke up their plans, and everything.

"I wanted to take her home, but she wouldn't have it. Set me aside. Said she'd rather go with him and bring him to his senses. Got in their car and boomed off down the Camino at more *kilos* per than the law allowed. He driving, of course. I was troubled. I loved her. I *did* love her. Ha! Get a kick out of even thinking that I one time did. Sitting here this way, watching her play the other fish. Isn't she great, the way she holds 'em off? Look at her now. Now. *Ha!*"

A shrill shriek of merriment came as I turned. One of the two men was on his feet, holding a bottle by its golden-foiled neck. His lips were moving rapidly, and from the bitterness of his gesture and facial contortion, I could not help but judge him in a temper. The woman was gently wafting a light silken bit of fluff in his face, and leaned back in her chair, palpitant with her hilarity.

I turned to my own companion, and discovered his eyes intently upon the fellow holding the threatening bottle. Then the fellow seemed to come to his senses, and resumed his seat next to the woman, still volubly talking. My companion smiled.

"And still we take the bait. But I'll go on. She went home with him, as she said. And must have talked turkey to him, at that. Soothed his worries over me, you see? Because when the Lak Gat let the tide of the Pasig turn her nose downstream a couple of days later, he was aboard, bound for Mindanao, his wife waving to him from a fussy launch that accompanied the ship down to the breakwater.

"That evening she called me up. Would I come over? I would. And I did. And she told me how sweetly she had sent her husband off. Followed him out to the breakwater, remember, in a steam launch, wearing a great garland of the red moss-roses that are the rubies of the cultivated flowers down there. Love, you know, and a teary farewell. Well, she told me how she had sent him back to the plantation. And why.

"Swore she was true to him, you see. He said he wanted her to go down to the hemp place with him. She said no; wanted him to see that he could trust her She would write—daily. He the same. He could write to any one else, to keep tabs on her. Swore to him she loved him. He

mentioned the scar on his face. She declared that it was not a disfigurement, but an honor.

"He mentioned the rumor—about the overseer's lady, see? She twined her lovely arms about his neck in the way they do, you know, and swore she never did, never would, never could, believe such tommyrot. Knew he was faithful to her, just as he must know she was faithful to him. Worked it quite prettily, I must say. He believed her. Both wanted the test of faith. Can't you imagine her pretty lips pouting as she protested this? And he—poor man—agreed. Gave her the love roses the morning he shipped in the Lak Gat. She followed the ship down the Pasig and well past the signal tower.

"And then that evening called me up.

"Told me all this, you see? Sweet of her. I got the humor of it, all right. Then suddenly she jerked her arms from around my neck, and her face went white and tense. Quite dramatic, of course. That's the way they like to be. Stage stuff—in 'em all. Jerked back from me and stared me in the eyes. Then poured forth the torrent of her hate. Hate? Naturally—of her husband, now joyfully at sea on the way to his plantation, secure in his new faith in her, and their new compact. I—I must help her. You see?

"If the brute ever returned—and he was to come back within a month to take her down to the hemp country, according to their terms—we must make way with him. Simple, eh? Kill him. Not cave-man stuff, no gun play or drama in this. Oh, no. Something that would work slowly but surely, cruelly, insidiously, hopelessly. Her arms went out to me again. The softness of them, man! You see what she's like over there with the oil king and the diamond expert. Got me going. Their way!

"I could do it. I *must* do it. I surely must know a way. And I did. I was—am—at least by profession, a physician. Of course I knew a way. I remonstrated at first. What else was I to do?

"Then she drew closer to me. Made promises. After the thing was well over, we could take a Blue Funneller to Hongkong, then Singapore, India, the Nile, the usual life. It—somehow it appealed. We're all weak. Holding her close—I agreed. We would work out the plot, and when he returned the thing would start. Meanwhile, we must not be seen in each other's company. That would be hard. No use telling of our parting, nor how, nor where we met in the days thereafter. How this delusion called love does make fools of us! She and I were both fools, I imagine. At least I—

"I had the stuff ready. Simple enough stuff for one who had a little knowledge. Slow acting, no particular symptoms. We talked it over and over. Husband used opium. That made it simpler. Oh, no—didn't use it in the way our idiotic Occidentals do. Not as a constant drug. But in the way so many Chinese, big merchants say, take the thing. You lived here a year and a half. You know how I mean. As a cocktail.

"Go down to business, about nine in the morning. And at ten thirty drift into the back room and smoke a pipe or two—as our men at home used to take a cocktail. About one o'clock, an hour before tiffin, another pipe. So later in the afternoon. Never overwork it—just as many of our men never drank to excess. Just as a cocktail, a stimulant. Go back to the desk more keen and alert and on the job. That's the way the husband, happy down in Mindanoa, used it. But just that was enough to make our scheme the prettier. Infallible.

"And after a reasonable time, so that she might have the pleasure of wearing widow's togs a few weeks, I imagine, off on that ship of the Blue Funnel Line. Hongkong first, with a bungalow on the mountainside, swimming out at Repulse Bay, rides about the island, shopping in one of those double sedan chairs with four coolies. Great sport! Talked it over and over and over. In love, fully agreed, absolutely determined. What more could a man want?

"Thus for one long blissful moon.

"She read the husband's letters to me. Got an immense kick out of 'em. Almost as much as I'm getting here now, watching her play those other—fish. *Ha!* Look there, will you? It's the diamond prince sore now. How she does play 'em! Never

sinks the hook deep enough to make 'em fighting mad, but just enough to make 'em break the surface once in a while. If they'd only snap her line!" My companion lit up one of his delectable cigarettes. "But they won't. Lord, what sport! Just to watch 'em!"

"Well, there's no use filling you up on how we made our surreptitious meetings. Baguio, of course—three or four days, I forget which. But cool up there. Delightful—five thousand feet altitude, the Simla of the Philippines in more ways than just climate, too. And Santa Cruz. And Pagsanjan. Moths of the night, you know, with the servants languishing under the vile duress of much *cumshaw* at her home, and mine. A few pesos have a wonderful effect upon the vision and the memory of the average Tagalog, I have found. They agreed. Had a kind of awe of me, too, I think. Perhaps because I was a medico.

"And hubby's letters kept coming up, with each ship or trading schooner that touched his wharves. They were good! faith, and trust, and love—all that kind of rot. And what he planned to have done with that scar, once the left the damned islands and could hit New York. Evidently read up on the plastic surgery the war brought out, you know. Lordy, the kick we got out of those disclosures of his heart and soul! Read 'em together, her arm about my neck, and mine rigged, with divine sentiment that would have been touching could he have seen it, around her slender waist. How we laughed!

"And how she hated him. Flare out at times, you know. Cursed him for ever coming into her life. Damned him for the ugly brute he was with that great scar. Reviled him for his philandering down there while the overseer was gone to the schooner. Prayed Heaven that they'd kill him before he reached home. Made me swear on the strength of our love that when he did return I'd see that he got the stuff we had prepared. Tigress? Well, I don't know. But a woman, anyway. Look at her there.

"Then things came to a climax.

"We were down at Pagjansan, just returned from shooting the rapids. Garland of those little white orchids in her hair—she'd had me climb the *liannas* of the cliff forty feet to tear 'em down for her. You can imagine how they looked—on the golden hair of her.

"No sooner had set foot ashore than one of her servants tossed away his cigarette, rose from the log on which he had been sitting, and with Filippino leisure made his way to us. His eye artfully disregarded our bathing suits the rapids made necessary. He handed her a newspaper and a note.

"She read them. Her face went whiter than the orchids clustered above her forehead. She screamed once. Clutched at me, suddenly recoiled at my touch.

"'Get away! Get away!' she screamed at me. 'Murderer! Get away!'

"You can imagine my utter bewilderment.

"'He's dead! He's dead! My poor husband—dead.' She turned on me with a sudden cold hate in her eyes. 'You—*you* made me send him away! You—made me murderer! You—you—*you* are a murderer!'

She fainted at my feet.

"I revived her. She thrust me away. She evidently meant what she had said. I was to get away, and stay. Never come into her life again. I had murdered her husband—whom she loved, *loved!* She screamed at me—'Get out!'

"I did so.

"That's why I enjoy myself so much here—watching her. She hates me now, you see. Doesn't know me, and all that. But she sees me wherever she goes, for I follow her about, and get quite a kick out of it. Annoying, wot?

"And *she's* the murdering tigress, all right. Sent him away with the poison in her heart against him. And now—she's at it again."

My companion paused and chuckled, this time, it seemed to me, rather sourly.

I leaned forward.

"But the husband—what had happened? You did not get the 'stuff' to him before he left Manila. What—"

The fellow threw back his head and laughed.

"Great Lord, no! The poor man was coming back to claim his wife again. But the Kam Chat hit the edge of the typhoon not ten hours from the bay, and went down with all hands. His pair were among 'em, passenger list said. Sad, but true. Drowned dead. And with him dead, she turned from me to him. Charmingly feminine, eh? I sort of pitied him then, with that ugly scarred face of his, and dead, but she coming back to the realization of her real love for him. And now—look at her."

I reached out my hand and took my companion firmly by the wrist.

"My friend, I have had my back to her, but nevertheless have seen much. And though your story is interesting, it lacks truth in one detail."

The strange lurking shadow that twice before had dimmed the sardonic glint in his eye came hovering uncertainly again. Then it vanished, and he threw back his head and laughed.

"You're good! She and I alone knew. But I'm curious. Just what is that one detail in which I am wrong?"

My grip tightened on his wrist.

"About the husband," I returned quietly. "He was not drowned."

"Not—" The fellow tried to get to his feet, but I held him well. Then he shrugged his shoulders indifferently, and showed his even white teeth once more. "Good joke! What, then, could have become of him?"

"He never took the ship from his plantation," I went on, rather grimly, I am afraid. "He never even arrived at his plantation. He sent a packet of letters to his overseer, with whom he never had trouble or occasion of trouble, despite vile rumor, and one by one this overseer mailed the letters to his wife in Manila. He never thought of returning to his hemp, as you call it. He went to Hongkong, and thence straight to New York. Surgeons fixed—"

The wrist jerked from my hand, and the man flung himself away from me.

"Who—who—are you?" he cried.

"I am the lady's husband," I replied. "I came to see. I am glad to hear from your lips that she truly loved—"

The man jerked out an oath, and something blue flashed in his hand. I was at him in an instant. Witnesses at the other tables saw I was defending myself. In the mêlée the pistol in his hand stunned me with its crashing report. I felt his body relax. He slid to the floor, limp, white.

A scream came from the table where my wife had arisen between her two companions, the oil man and the other. An instant she stared at me. Then I saw her clutch at her heart.

She screamed again, my name.

"Jack!" Tottered toward me, arms outstretched.

I raised my own to take her.

Then her eyes fell to the man upon the floor.

She recoiled from me, as she had two years before when first she saw the disfiguring scar the mad head hunter had slashed upon my face. Then fell upon her knees beside the man whom she had thrown away when the news came of my death.

"Oh, you killed him, you've killed him! Get away, away! You—you—*murderer*—you've killed—you've killed—my poor—"

With something dully pounding in my head, something that the man who had told me his secret story had said about the woman who was my wife, I left her as she fainted across his body.

Then I braced my shoulders. Two years ago. Well—anyway, there was no change in Shanghai—or the woman.

THE CAUTIOUS ROBIN

TH' incautious lark at dawn is heard
In carols loud and pert,
By spring's deceptions undeterred;
But Mr. Robin, careful bird,
Still wears his flannel shirt!

Carlyle Smith.

All for Love

By CARROLL JOHN DALY

HARRY BROWN, age eighteen, leaned upon the rustic support of the bridge and gazed dejectedly into the muddy water. Unconscious of the piercing eyes of the boy hidden among the bushes on the river's bank, he enacted to perfection a pantomime of a rejected lover.

Regarding a bunch of violets which were all but lost in the sumptuous environment of tin foil, he squeezed them between his fingers until he saw in their crushed loveliness the analogy of his trampled hope. After an inward struggle he tore a tiny signet ring from his little finger, and, much to the surprise and delight of the boy upon the bank, kissed it several times. Having satisfactorily fulfilled a duty to his lost love, he carefully tied the ring to the wire of the bouquet, and, fearing to wait lest his resolution fail, cast the flowers into the water.

A few minutes later the boy advanced upon the bridge and stealthily approached the young man.

"Ain't ya goin' ta jump in?" he asked suddenly.

Startled from his unpleasant reverie, Harry turned and recognized, with some trepidation, Chester Robinson.

"Ain't ya goin' ta jump in?" the boy repeated. There was an unmistakable note of disappointment in his voice.

"Jump in? What for?" Harry evinced great surprise.

"I seen ya throw the flowers in, and I thought you were goin' after them. It's the regular thing."

"What's the regular thing?"

"That's what they all do when they get treated like you was."

"Treated like I was?"

"Yes—like you was. I hear ya get the gate?"

"Get the gate?"

Chester grew tired of such subterfuge.

"Now look here, Harry Brown, don't try and come that game on me. I was

behind the hedge at the Swanson's and seen and heard everything."

Pretended ignorance at an end, Harry advanced threateningly upon the small boy.

"Let me tell you something, Ches Robinson, I don't care how little you are. If you get following me around and telling all you see, I'll—I'll—"

Harry paused. Unable to think of a suitable punishment, he scowled down upon the boy, leaving the retribution in horrible doubt.

"You won't do nothin'." Chester waved the threat aside, and then to assure his own safety added: "Leastwise, if you do, you'll wish you hadn't."

"Oh, I won't, eh? You just wait and see."

Taking these continued threats as a sign of weakening resolution, the boy smiled—a superior smile.

"You got me all wrong, Harry. I don't want to tell what I seen. I just want to help you—help ya get your girl back—Dorothy Swanson."

"Here now—you just leave her name out of it."

"A'right. But I wouldn't let no toy major in a toy army run off with my girl."

"You don't like Major Fitzgerald?" Harry questioned thoughtfully.

This question was superfluous, for Major Fitzgerald was the instructor of the high school cadets, and a hatred of all teachers, no matter how remotely connected with school work, was inherent to Chester.

"Naw, I don't," the boy answered. "But that ain't got nothin' to do with it. Do you want me to help you or not? I ain't got all day."

Harry was about to repudiate this offer with scorn when it came to him that Chester was far better as a friend than an enemy. Experience taught him that this small boy's vengeance for a wrong was quick and certain. Still, he must be careful. Chester Robinson hardly looked well in the part of an angel of mercy.

"You don't believe I was there when you got the bad news," Chester read his thoughts. "Will I tell you what I seen?"

"Yes—yes." Harry wanted time to think.

"Well," the boy began, "I was behind the hedge at Swanson's when you came along. Just before you reached the gate you stopped and took a bunch of violets from under your coat. Guess you didn't want no one to know you had 'em, 'cause they'd kid ya and—"

"Never mind guessing," Harry interrupted sharply.

"Then you walked in the gate and bumped right smack into the major what was comin' out. It was some smash, and you lost your violets and he lost his hat. Then he said that you wanted to be more careful where you was goin', and that he remembered you as a clumsy recruit in the high school company last year, and you never would be good for nothin'."

"Never mind what he said," Harry cut in again, startled by the accuracy of the account.

"Then he beat it," the boy went on. "And you picked up the flowers and dusted 'em off and looked up at the house with a kind o' sick look and heaved a sigh."

"I did not." The elder youth denied this statement with unnecessary vigor.

There was a pause of nearly a minute.

"Go on," Harry gulped at length. An ally with such an eye for detail was worth having.

"You quit buttin' in, then," Chester objected, and then continued: "Then little Florence Swanson she come from behind the house suckin' on a lollypop, and told you she seen the major kissin' Dor—your girl. Then you got mad, and she laughed and jumped up and down and started singin': 'He kissed her. The major kissed her. I'm glad and Harry's mad, 'cause the major kissed her.'"

"That's enough," Harry muttered as the unpleasant picture of the little girl of twelve, dancing up and down before him, too vividly presented itself.

"Now, then—you see what I know." Chester spread his legs far apart and dug his hands deep into his trouser pockets. "Do you want me to get your girl back for you?"

"Of course you want me to do something in return?" There was no derision in the young man's voice now.

"Of course. You can't expect to get somethin' for nothin'. It's just a matter of business. We got to sign an agreement."

"All right." Harry nodded his head.

Chester produced pencil and paper and, leaning upon the railing of the bridge, began to write. With the exception of an occasional suck of the pencil and a few pensive glances at the flowing stream, he worked rapidly. Finishing, he regarded the paper carefully, made one or two corrections, and, ignoring the outstretched hand of Harry, diligently made a copy.

With methodical precision he crossed some neglected t's and dotted several i's which were attempting to pass as e's. Then, signing his name with a flourish, he presented the two papers to the anxious Harry with the single comment:

"Sign on the dotted line."

With the critical eye of one who some day expects to grace the learned profession of the law, Harry read the document.

> I, Chester Robinson, party of the first part, and him, Harry Brown, party of the second part, do here, then and now enter into an agreement. We swear to stand by each other and see this thing threw. Chester Robinson to see that Harry Brown gets his girl back the same as she was before—to be his girl and no others. Harry Brown to do the one thing that Chester Robinson asks him weather he likes it or not. Harry Brown swears this and hopes to die if he don't—which he will—XXXXX. If Chester Robinson don't make good and fix Harry up with his girl—this paper ain't no good—being null and valid.
>
> (Signed) I—Chester Robinson,
> Party of first part.
> (Signed) Him .....,
> Party of second part.

The reading of this masterpiece gave rise to serious objections on Harry's part. It did not seem to show the proper respect due Dorothy, but on Chester's suggestion that he put her name into the document Harry felt that it was better as it stood. Then arose the question of the thing Harry must do in return. Harry's insistence that it must be honorable Chester refused to write into the agreement.

The boy held that the thing would be honorable, but that he and Harry might differ as to the proper meaning of the word honorable, but he was willing to add that it was nothing Harry could get arrested for. Again Harry thought that it was better without such a codicil, and no other concession would the boy make.

"You tell me what it is you want me to do—then I'll sign," Harry pleaded.

"I'll tell you when I get your girl back. Why a man like you oughta be willin' to do most anything for a girl like Dorothy, even to—" Chester paused, he was about to add the word "murder," but instinct warned him it that it would only double the doubts now arising in Harry's mind.

It was "a man like you" and "a girl like Dorothy" that decided him, and being of a romantic nature, Harry threw all caution aside and signed the paper.

With a smile which caused a sudden quick beating to the already overtaxed heart of Harry the small conspirator folded one of the papers and, placing it carefully in the inside pocket of his coat, turned and, without a word, started toward town.

"Hold on," Harry called after him. "Let me know what you're going to do?"

"What I'm goin' ta do? Ah—there's them that wish they knew—I'm a fast worker—watch and wait." With a cautious movement of his finger to his lips the boy sped away and was lost to view among the trees.

Chester was far from being unselfish in his desire to help Harry Brown. But his purpose was so far reaching, so intricate, and so profound that no mind but his could have thought it out nor shaped its course to a definite end.

If a great passion be necessary to spur us on to attain a more than difficult end Chester was well equipped. He had two—love and hate.

If little Florence Swanson had ruined Harry's life she had also ruined Chester's. She was over fond of Chester, admiring what she called "his daring" and what her parents called "his villainy." Being artful and determined she set up the claim that Chester was her "feller" and asserted that fact to Muriel Plant whom Chester looked upon with eyes of love.

Muriel believed, or pretended to believe, and taunted him for his unfaithfulness. In pride and indignation Chester renounced

Muriel for ever and ever, telling her a few things that greatly surprised that well-behaved young lady. But for ever and ever is not long in childhood, and Chester's lasted only until the following afternoon when he returned repentant, to find that it was Muriel's turn to shower abuse and refuse his overtures of peace.

So he hated Florence, and having met her in the village on the previous day, left her no room for doubt regarding his sentiments.

Leaving Harry, Chester made his way straight back to the Swanson house. He paused by the gate seemingly unaware of Florence's presence on the front lawn. But she saw him, and as the womanly heart possesses the power to forgive, she forgot his insults of yesterday and, encouraged by his proximity to her home, approached the gate and tried a greeting.

"Hello, Ches." She removed her lollypop for better articulation.

"'Lo, Slobbers." Slobbers was her nickname and, although her family resented it, she personally saw nothing distasteful in the pseudonym. Indeed, on the lips of Chester it even carried a musical sound pleasing to her ears.

"Want ta come in?" she invited, wiping her chin with the back of her hand.

"Who me? Naw!" This was not the sort of invitation that Chester demanded.

"Ah, come on in." This was a plea and different. Chester accepted the invitation and, ignoring the gate, jumped the fence.

Florence, somewhat excited and surprised at her conquest, led the boy to a shady and distant part of the yard.

"Ain't mad at me no more, are you, Ches?" Florence questioned.

"Me mad—what for?" This was rather disconcerting after the no uncertain character portrayal of yesterday.

"Want to play house?" Florence changed the subject in some confusion.

"Naw!" Chester got down to business. "Say, who do ya think I met comin' along the road, Slobbers? That stuck-up Harry Brown; guess he thinks he's some one." He finished contemptuously.

"Oh, him; I don't like him." She made a face.

"He's no good—but I won't say nothin' about him 'cause he's visitin' here all the time."

"He won't visit here no more." Florence laughed scornfully.

"Why not?" He tried to ask the question indifferently, but the eager note crept into his voice.

Florence grew careful. "Can't tell." She stuck the lollypop far into her mouth as an added aid to silence.

"Humph! Don't believe ya." Chester questioned the young lady's veracity without giving offense. "Do you know, Slobbers, I usen'ta come around here just 'cause he came. I can't look at him."

This statement forced out the lollypop, and the thumb took its place. Florence was thinking.

"I'd tell ya if—" She finally brought forth this incomplete sentence.

"If what? If what, Slobbers?" The boy leaned forward.

"If you was my feller?"

"But ain't I?" Chester enthusiastically claimed the distinction he had so vigorously denied the previous day. "Didn't you say I was your feller? Didn't you say so your own self?"

"Yes," she admitted reluctantly, "but you said it wasn't so."

"D'ya think I want the whole town to know my affairs?"

"Are ya really my feller, Ches?"

"Absolutely." He gulped the words. "But I won't be 'less you tell me everything."

This threat produced the desired information.

"Well, then," she blurted out, overjoyed by his admission, "I told Harry Brown that I seen Major Fitzgerald kissin' Dorothy, and he believed it and went away mad. Then I told Dorothy that I seen Harry walkin' with Mildred Huggins when he had a date with her—and she's mad, and I just guess she won't slap me again 'cause I peeked through the curtains when she give Harry her ring."

"And—and didn't she kiss the major at all?" Chester's voice shook with excitement.

"Of course she didn't."

"Well—guess I'll be goin'." Chester turned toward the front lawn.

"What—goin'?" She was surprised by the sudden gruff change in his voice.

"Yes—goin'—" He was about to add other things, but thought better of it. Running quickly across the grass he vaulted the fence with his good news.

Twenty minutes later Harry Brown received a mysterious telephone call, the result of which was that he rebrushed his blue serge suit, purchased another bunch of violets and, partaking of a scanty supper, hastened to the Swanson home. For a half hour or more he promenaded before Dorothy's door until the extinguishing lights in the dining room assured him that his call would not be regarded, with his hungry look, as suspicious. Then he boldly advanced and rang the front door bell.

It was nearly ten o'clock when he again appeared on the front porch, and well after the hour when he finally bid Dorothy good night. Radiant with happiness he descended the steps and walked briskly through the gateway.

"Well, how did you come out?"

Harry was startled by the sudden appearance of a small boy at his side.

For ten minutes Chester talked and Harry listened—listened surprised and shocked that one so young could be so deep and scheming. Finishing, Chester disappeared as noiselessly as he had come, leaving Harry to thoughts which were not so pleasant as ten minutes before. Chester had made his demand.

For more than a week Chester dogged the steps of "the party of the second part" like some evil shadow always demanding: "Have ya done it?" and "Is it a'right?"

One night when the boy was more persistent that usual Harry decided to have it out with him.

"I'll tell you, Ches," he said. "It's not honorable and it's not right; besides the thing can't be done. It's impossible."

"You had your chance last night. I seen him leavin' your house. Have you tried it?" The boy stuck to his point.

"Well—er—yes." It was a half-hearted response and the boy grew distrustful.

"You promised and put it down on paper." Receiving no reply Chester became threatening.

"Let me tell you one thing, Harry Brown. You think 'cause you got the girl back without much trouble that the thing was easy and now you wanta crawl outa what you signed your name to. You think that things is all right. Well, they ain't. I got her back for ya and I can take her away again. I'm a fast worker, Mr. Harry Brown—you look out."

"Don't you try to scare me, Chester Robinson, because it won't work. You better not fool with me." He finished as he caught the dangerous look in the boy's eyes. "I'll fix you—you little—shrimp."

"You would, eh? You would!" Chester snarled through his teeth as he drew back a step. "Mr. Harry Brown, your goose is cooked. Watch and wait."

"Now, lissen, Slobbers"—Chester was still at a hot argument that had already lasted half an hour in the Swanson back yard—"Now, lissen, I ain't been round 'cause I thought you lied to me about Harry Brown. Why wouldn't I? Him bein' here every day. Now lissen, while he comes, I won't. Now you heard your sister tell him that if he ever went and lost that ring she wouldn't have nothin' more to do with him.

"All you gota say is that you seen him give that ring to Mildred Huggins. If Dorothy don't believe ya it don't make no difference. He can't show the ring. I know that. That ain't much for you to do for me. Come on! You do it and I'll be your feller again."

For the twentieth time Chester held out that alluring promise to her, but she shook her head.

"He give me a whole box of lollypops," she said, still sucking on one of the box which stood between Chester and his great desire.

"Won't nothin' make you do it?" the boy pleaded desperately.

Florence shook her head from side to side and then she suddenly stopped in the middle of a shake and giggled.

"I might." She removed the lollypop, filling up the gap with her thumb. "I'll do it if—if you kiss me. Then I'll know

you're really and truly my feller," she added quickly, seeing the look of horror creep into the boy's face.

"Kiss ya! Me—kiss you. Do you think I've gone—" He paused. Why not? She had lied about him. He could promise. That didn't mean he had to do it.

"A'right, Slobbers, I'll do it—if you do this for me."

"But you gotta kiss me first." She had no false pride and became suspicious when he gave in so readily.

Chester gasped at her lack of maidenly modesty and her distrust of her fellow humans. But he made up his mind quickly. Yes, he would do this thing. The little thing he had requested of Harry Brown was nothing as compared to the supreme sacrifice he was about to make to regain the love of the lost Muriel. He felt almost noble as he looked down upon the face of Florence. His chest swelled with pride. Would Muriel ever guess—ever know. Twice he leaned forward and lost his nerve.

"Right on the lips." Florence warned. "Else it won't count."

"Ain't ya gotta handkerchief or somethin'? Well then wipe that lollypop stuff off. Whata ya think I am, anyways?"

She did as he asked in an effort to make things as easy as possible.

Once again he tried but failed.

"Here, give me ya hankerchief." He snatched it out of her hand and after moistening it in the usual manner began vigorously to clean the area to be attacked. Discouraged by her squeals rather than pleased with his efforts, he finished the job and closing his eyes he leaned suddenly down and kissed her. So unexpected was the kiss and with so much force did he bend that Florence was thrust backward. Losing her balance she stumbled over a flower pot and sat upon the grass.

"There!" Chester exclaimed triumphantly as he wiped his mouth with the sleeve of his coat. "There, Slobbers, I done it." Then as Florence got to her feet he attempted to assure the success of his plans by the promise of another embrace when her mission was fulfilled.

Nothing daunted by the roughness of the first embrace Florence smiled her appreciation of his promise and departed to do her evil work.

With a sad and thoughtful look Harry Brown left the light of his heart and the apple of his eye. He had told Dorothy his first real lie. Told her that her ring was at the jeweler's having a heart carved under the signet. She believed him and he promised to produce the ring within the week.

Of course, he saw Chester's hand in the whole thing, but he did not know how it had been worked. But that was not troubling him at present. He could not produce a duplicate of the ring, for the original had been sent to Dorothy from abroad, and he could not produce the original because that was lying at the bottom of the little river and—yet—

The following afternoon several people stopped in astonishment upon seeing a young man in a bathing suit diving from the little bridge into the cold and muddy water. Nothing daunted by the gibes of passing farmers, Harry Brown kept at his work.

When the curious had gone their way and Harry looked up from the bank where he was resting, he discovered that Chester Robinson stood upon the bridge regarding him intently.

"Lost somethin'?" There was triumph as well as sarcasm in the small boy's voice.

Harry was too dejected and tired to take offense; he simply looked at the boy.

"Don't you wish you had done the right thing by me?" the boy jeered from his safe position upon the bridge.

There was no reply. Chester thought a moment.

"It ain't too late yet to get her back again—I mean to be able to keep her. I won't trust you no more, Harry Brown, but I'll give you some advice. You do what you agreed to do in writing and I'll fix things for you. Never mind how—but you do it."

Without waiting for an answer Chester slid from the rail on which he had been sitting and trotted away. For the first time since his row with Muriel his heart was light. He had worked hard, but if Harry

had half the wit that he gave him credit for both Muriel and honor would be his.

Came the Saturday afternoon that all Newton was awaiting. The competitive drill was to take place in the armory. It was a grand affair followed by a dance and the best drilled soldier of the high school cadets had the honor of selecting the young lady who was to lead the grand march with him.

Squads right! Squads left! Up and down they marched to draw up before the reviewing stand, every gun coming down together—or almost together. Major Fitzgerald was in glory as he stood proudly before the four companies awaiting the signal that the drill should begin.

Colonel Winton was the honored guest. He had come over from Fort Lotus to pick the winning soldier—the best drilled cadet in the entire city of Newton. Tall and erect, he stood by the side of the major, his piercing eyes running down the double line of boys. It was these same eyes that would see the defects that eliminated the candidates until one only was left upon the floor.

Chester Robinson found himself in the second row of the freshman company and directly before the seats occupied by Muriel Plant and family. Chester was in the second row because, as Major Fitzgerald put it, there was no third or fourth row—and Chester was his worst soldier.

But this afternoon Chester resolved to do his best. He saw more than a hope of winning the medal—in fact, he looked upon it as a certainty unless—

Chester straightened up. The drill was on. The buzz of the people in the seats died away; interest was centered entirely upon the young soldiers. There was always uncertainty in this competition, though the general feeling was that Bert Huggins, the senior winner of last year, would repeat.

As the drill proceeded Colonel Winton would retire those boys who handled their guns badly, were slow in response to orders or for some slight mistake not apparent to the civilian eye.

More and more were retired until twelve only remained upon the floor and much to the surprise of his comrades Chester Robinson was one of that twelve.

Six—four—and then two remained upon the floor. One of them was Bert Huggins—the other Chester Robinson.

It was with a questioning voice and elevated eyebrows that Major Fitzgerald continued with his orders. He had seen at least a dozen errors made by Chester in as many minutes and they had apparently missed the keen eyes of Colonel Winton.

"Right shoulder—arrrrrrrms! Left shoulder—arrrrms!" and Chester's hat went off and laid upon the floor. But he looked neither to left nor right. Surely this was an end of him.

Harry Brown in a distant corner of the armory hid his head in his hands. He was afraid to see the end—the end of his hopes, for with the going of Chester would—

His thoughts were rudely interrupted by a great shouting. The contest was over. Without looking up he knew that one and one only stood upon the floor. Slowly he raised his head. Yes, the contest was over and—Chester had won. There he stood alone and Colonel Winton was advancing to pin the gold medal on his manly breast.

Amid the great cheers that greeted the best drilled soldier in Newton, Chester slowly advanced to the side of the fair Muriel and asked her to lead the grand march with him. Muriel, proud and flattered at being so honored, forgot and forgave, and Chester breathed a sigh of relief. His mighty project was at last accomplished.

Two hours later, condescending to one of Harry Brown's many urgent appeals, Chester went aside with him.

"What about that ring, Ches—what about it? What are you trying to dodge me for?" Harry was indignant, for Chester had led him a merry chase.

Chester smiled. "You did what I asked you ta and I always make good whatever I put to paper. You needn't be worried. Here's your ring." He produced the ring and handed it to Harry, who examined it critically.

"It's the same one." Harry was surprised.

"A'course it is. When I make a promise—"

"Tell me how you got it, Ches?" Harry interrupted; what he felt was the beginning of a long oration.

"How I got it?" Chester rubbed his chin and smiled. "Why I had it in my pocket for over a week. I seen you tie it onta the violets and throw them inta the water. Then I seen them come up and drift ashore just a little ways from where I was hidin'. Why, I had that ring before ever I spoke to you on the bridge. I work mighty fast and—"

A rough hand was laid upon his shoulder, checking further speech. For a moment he was afraid to turn; could this be the police? Then he faced about.

"Well, Slobber's, what's eatin' ya?" Chester grinned, he was greatly relieved.

"Oh, Ches!" she said. "I'm so proud of my feller." Then, lowering her voice, she whispered, "When do I get that other kiss."

He had been willing to forgive; willing to forget the past, and she came upon him with this horrible suggestion. For a moment he stood speechless with rage—then his anger disappeared. He was too happy to-day. The smile returned to his little round face.

"Wanta do something for me, Harry?" he called to the bigger boy, who was just departing.

"Anything at all, Ches," Harry returned at once. "If I can help you I'll—"

"Oh, that's a'right," Chester said lightly. "Just clean up this child's face and—and then kiss it. I'm too busy."

With a chuckle he thrust his hands deep into his trouser pockets and went whistling down the center of the armory.

Edna Brown, Harry's sister, sat up late that night with her fiancé, Colonel Winton.

"You should put this marriage of ours ahead a month on the strength of what I did for you this afternoon," Colonel Winton said at parting. "I don't know when I so disgraced myself. Why, that boy was the worst imitation of a soldier that I ever saw. Talk of love and duty—all bosh! Love wins every time."

"There, there, don't be cross about it," she smiled up at him. "We know what it is to love—perhaps others can care just as much as we do. At any rate you made my brother very happy and by doing that you made me—"

But he stopped her with a kiss.

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'Tis the sound of my lady's feet!

I caught the gleam of her garment,
Purple and gold in a glow,
'Twas only the leaves of a crocus,
You say, peeping up through the snow;
But I have a sweeter fancy,
'Twas the dress of my lady, I know!

I feel her breath on my forehead,
Her voice in the glade I heard;
Though you but mutter of zephyrs,
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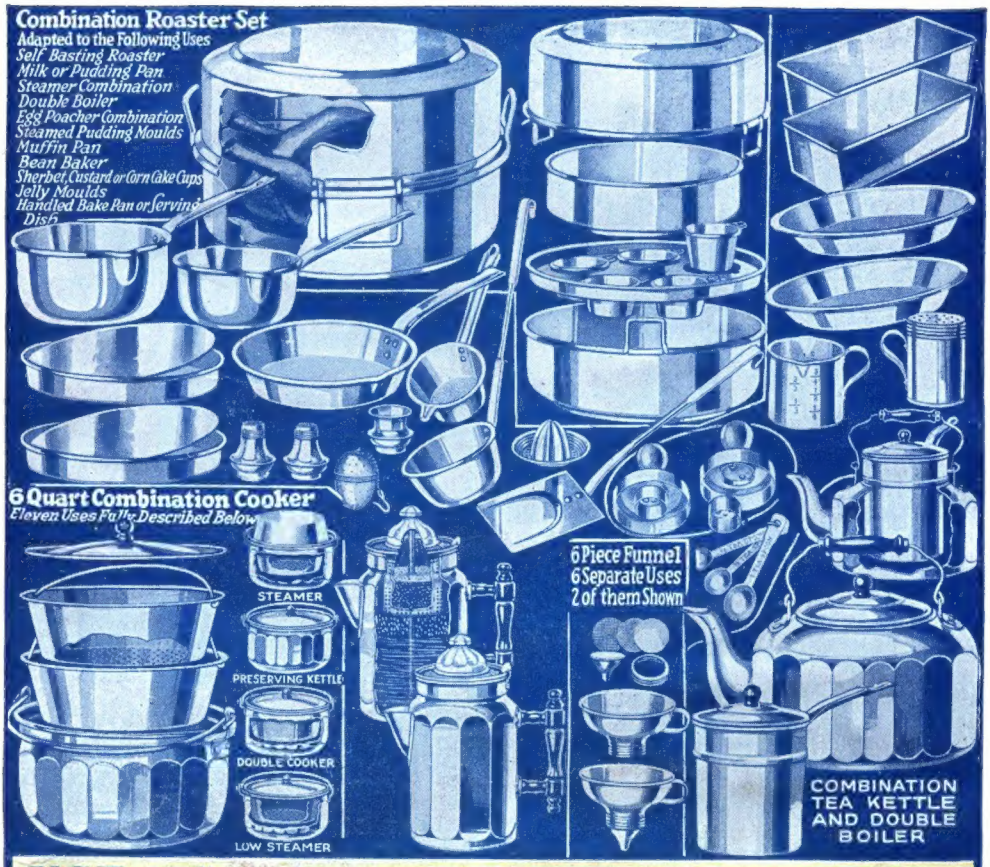

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